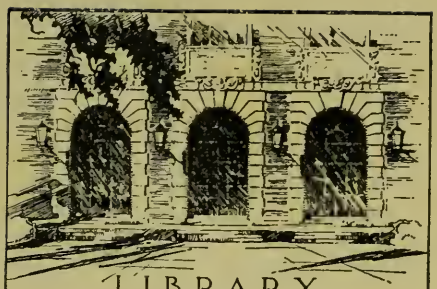

FALSE COLOURS.

VOL. III.

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FALSE COLOURS.

A Novel.

BY

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ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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CONTENTS.

FALSE COLOURS.

CHAPTER I.

SON AND HEIR.

Mrs. Hepburn was the mother of as weak and wailing a son and heir as hopes were ever built upon. His advent into the world had been heralded by as heavy a domestic storm as had ever burst over Glene. On the day before his birth, Amelia had been feeling especially beneficent, and had, in the brimming over of her kindness, lured old Mrs. Scorrier within her border. The master of the house was safely away at Redford for an indefinite period, that would, she felt sure, extend until evening. On her repeatedly assuring old Mrs. Scorrier that this conviction as to Mr. Hepburn's absence was a true one, that lady got into the carriage, from which she had been seen on the high road

by Mrs. Hepburn, and was conveyed safely to Glene.

It was not a pleasant thing, Mrs. Scorrier found, as soon as she got there, to be in that house secretly. In imagination she had often been at Glene, revelling in its beauties, interested in everything with which she could identify its "noble owner," as she called him in her mind. But in the flesh she could neither revel nor be interested. She could only feel vaguely cowed and regretful, vaguely frightened and nervous, as she followed through the house in the wake of Amelia.

"There is no portrait of Mr. Hepburn?" she said, inquiringly, as she wandered through the picture gallery.

"No, none," said Amelia; "it's one of his prejudices not to have his likeness taken in any way."

Mrs. Scorrier sighed. She remembered that it had been one of Mr. Scorrier's prejudices.

"It's a pity rather, that he should not have it taken, to be hung up here with the other owners of Glene," Mrs. Hepburn said. "His son, if he ever has one, will be robbed of the

pleasure of pointing out his father on these walls; and it would be a pleasure, for my husband is a very fine-looking man."

"Is he like any of these gentlemen?" Mrs. Scorrier asked.

"No — yes, he is though," Amelia said, hesitatingly. "I get an idea of him sometimes when I look at this one;" and she pointed to a gentleman in a doublet and ruff, with an egg-shaped face and oval beard. "That is Archibald Hepburn; he was a great friend of James the Second's, and——"

"Is he like the present Mr. Hepburn?" Mrs. Scorrier asked, with the vague fear strengthening within her.

"Yes," Amelia said, laughing. "Mr. Hepburn does not like to hear me say it; but he is. Archibald Hepburn was not the most respectable of his ancestors. Here, at Glene, he lived more like a Grand Turk than a Christian gentleman. There's a drop of Hepburn blood in a good many of the Danebury village families up to this day, and it shocks my husband's high sense of morality, and makes him dislike the resemblance.

"He has a high sense of morality," Mrs. Scorrier said, softly. "I always think of him, though I never saw him, as one of the best of men."

"So he is one of the best of men," Mrs. Hepburn said, indifferently; "rather hard with his goodness, as the best of men are apt to be. I shock him sometimes by mentioning dreadful things carelessly. Bayswater is not the place where unconscious innocence can be cultivated successfully; he himself is such a knight of purity that he can't deal gently with the erring."

Amelia said all this with a good deal of wifely pride. Glene was dull, and Mr. Hepburn was often very wearisome; but his unimpeachable morality put him on a pedestal before other people, and gave him a decided stand-point which he would otherwise have lacked.

"He can't deal gently with the erring," she repeated, as if she was mentioning some most commendable trait in his character.

"He should—they deal so hardly with themselves sometimes," Mrs. Scorrier said, plaintively; and then she glanced again at Archibald Hepburn, and wondered whether her brain was

distraught, or whether there really was any resemblance between that painted face and the dead one she had loved so well. Speculating on this, she got warm and tearful, and as warmth and tearfulness do not improve the feminine face, even in youth, it may easily be conceived that Mrs. Scorrier in distress could scarcely be the object of admiring commiseration.

"Now, come into my room, and have a cup of tea," Mrs. Hepburn said, anxious to terminate the tearful progress through the picture gallery. "Is Glene as pretty a place as you fancied it? I hope some day to see you here more pleasantly, when Mr. Hepburn——"

She stopped abruptly, paralyzed almost as Bluebeard's wife must have been when she felt that the moment of her detection was at hand. As she named him the door opened, and Mr. Hepburn himself stood in the space.

"I have transacted my business at Redford in a less fatiguing way; I have written a note instead of going there," he said, pleasantly.

Then he came a step or two into the gallery, and bowed to Mrs. Scorrier, not knowing in the least who she was; and then, before an intro-

duction could be effected, he remembered an important admonition he had to give a person, and turned back out of the gallery to give it, leaving his wife perplexed, and Mrs. Scorrier brain-struck, mind-struck, heart-struck.

"I am sorry Mr. Hepburn should have come back in such a way; I hate surprises," Amelia said, in an annoyed tone, not noticing Mrs. Scorrier in her wrath. "I knew you didn't wish to meet him, or he didn't wish to meet you, or something of the sort, and now I have meddled and got myself into a scrape."

In spite of her height and her fine well developed figure, Mrs. Hepburn looked so small as she spoke, so fractious, and powerless! She turned querulously towards that door of the gallery through which Mr. Hepburn had vanished, and so the expression of Mrs. Scorrier's face was freed from observation.

Such an agonized, distracted expression it was that flashed up and took possession of that usually placid face when the master came in and gave his little conventional explanation of his premature appearance on the home boards; such a bewildered, half-maddened, hunted, deceived

look stamped itself on the patient features that had been trained to bear and forbear so long! For a moment or two, while the young wife was lamenting that her old husband should have returned in this way, to her discomfiture, the guest, who was there without his leave and against his will, stared at him as though she had been, and felt herself to be, both his conqueror and his slave. For in the master of Glene, before whose high morality her head had been bowed in abasement for so many years; in the husband of this lady by her side, who had been lamenting that the son she might bear him would have no portrait of his father to point to with pride,—in this champion of untarnished integrity, she recognized the lover of her youth, the father of poor Arthur!

The thought of him saved her from betraying herself. With a strong effort she recovered her voice, and collected her faculties, and made the "dread of Mr. Hepburn's annoyance" the screen to hide the want of that composure of manner which she could not recover.

"I will go at once," she said, with such a one of decision that Amelia was almost startled.

"I am rightly punished for having come here without my son's knowledge."

"But why? how?" Amelia asked. "If you go out at the little side-door from his room, Mr. Hepburn won't meet you again; or shall I send you home in my carriage?"

She made the offer in a tone that said as plainly as possible, "Pray don't put me to inconvenience by accepting it;" so Mrs. Scorrier relieved her by rejecting it at once.

"Let me get away through your little side-door; yes, any way—that will do."

Mrs. Scorrier found herself saying these words, which sounded in her ears as if they had not proceeded from her own mouth; found herself going out at the side-door and down some steps; found herself walking, now rapidly, now slowly, along the ground that belonged to Arthur's father, and on which she was an alien and an intruder.

It is not an easy task to describe what this woman felt as she staggered along under the weight of this newly-adjusted burden, under the smarting, cruel pain of this lately-given blow. It is, indeed, a task so difficult that I

will only state the circumstances, and leave those who can feel to imagine how they must have affected her.

The two ideals of her life had been destroyed. The faith which had been hers for thirty years had been violently uprooted in a moment. As she tottered along, longing to hide herself from the light of day, her injuries and her credulities formed a long array, and paraded themselves before her. And viewing her life with scorn and sad hopelessness, she could but review it with bitter clear-sightedness. She saw herself once more a girl, as she was in her innocence, in the days of her happy unconscious innocence in her father's house. Peace and goodwill presided there, and if vulgarity was enthroned with them, at least it was virtuous vulgarity, which never caused a blush. Then came the quick change, the love, the fear, and the final flight with the man who called himself Scorrier. Then the year of love and happiness flashed before her eyes. That year went by so rapidly that (in spite of often-recurring disappointments connected with the marriage he always promised her) she could not be unhappy. Once more she

woke to the morning of his departure to consult his lawyers; once more she lived through the dull monotony of the days during which no tidings of him reached her; once more her heart died within her in a sorrowful agony of love and despair as she recalled the words in which she read that he was drowned.

She was old and stout now. All remains of beauty had vanished from her face and form. But there was something almost grandly tragic in the way in which she presently stood motionless, wrestling with a demon of revenge. He should be punished for the bitter mockery of those mourning years; he should feel the heart-sickening silence which she had been made to feel; he should bear his portion of the grief and remorse as she had borne hers; he should be shown in his true colours as seducer, liar, coward; he should be — spared if it was in her power to spare him.

The gentler spirit had prevailed, and the demon of revenge had been worsted. But the woman in whom the struggle had taken place walked back to her son's house with a heart as heavy and broken as her step.

The bitter mockery of those many mourning years! How the wraiths of them kept on coming before her, showing her all she had done in them, reminding her of how faithfully she had loved and grieved. Those hours spent by his grave, praying for his soul, praying that he might be forgiven for all eternity the wrong he had done her through all time. Those wreaths of immortelles, those sad sounds she had heard from the sea, those weary, hopeless weepings. All these had been won from her—forced upon her, given by her to a lie, and to a myth.

It was such double treachery, such foul deceit, which she now was compelled to recognize. At one fell blow her two ideals were smashed to pieces—the lover who had died young, and whom she had invested in her own mind with the intention of repairing the evil he had done her, and the lofty-minded friend who had shrunk from all contact with her, because she had been the cause and the partner of his friend's frailty. These images of love and rectitude were utterly overthrown, and in these first moments of their overthrow there seemed to be nothing left to her in the world to which she could cling.

Those long years of quiet endurance of guiltlessness and patient endeavour to live out the memory of her lost reputation! How the wraiths of them mocked her now and again, as she stumbled along on her homeward path. She had been a credulous fool, instead of a fond, faithful mourner. She had respected a sham, and she had lamented a sham; and this day the man who had tricked her into doing both things had stood revealed before her, prosperous and happy, the husband of another woman.

The husband of another woman, and in the sight of heaven she was his wife! She, and not that other woman who bore his name, and lived honoured in his house, had the first right to him. Her heart went back to the old days when it had been given to him, to the one happy year during which he had seemed to prize the gift, to the time when he had it in his power to make reparation to her. He had been young and handsome, gallant-looking, "such a man as any woman might love," she had often told herself proudly then. How he was degraded now by his false pretensions, by his

criminal concealment, by his cowardliness generally.

Had he recognized her? This question she asked herself over and over again during that terrible walk. Had he recognized her and feared her, that he had turned away so quickly? She could give herself no satisfactory answer; she could only hope and conjecture, and she did, after the manner of women, hope and conjecture such irreconcilable things.

She trusted that he had known her; that he had felt humbled, and conscience-stricken, and terribly afraid before her. It was only good and well that he should quake in spirit, in dread of the disclosures she might make. He deserved to suffer any suffering which she could inflict upon him. Had he not wronged her to such a degree as woman was never wronged before by one whom she trusted? Had he not tricked her into tears that need never have been shed, into a mourning that need never have been made? Had he not woven about her such a web of delusions that she could never hope to break through it, and live and move fairly and clearly again? Had he not done all this,

and could she, remembering it all, spare him? It was a painfully difficult question for her to answer. A terribly difficult question to consider impartially in this early hour of her anger. She would try to do what was best. She would forego every selfish consideration, and only think of what would be well for Arthur—the son whom she had trained to love the ideal father, and who must, if the truth were known, despise the real one.

When she reached her son's house, she got herself away to her own room without delay or interruption from any one. Then she sat down and thought still more about it—thought more coherently and connectedly than she had been able to do while she was walking home.

For thirty years she had worn widow's weeds for this man who still lived. For thirty years she had esteemed a person who had never existed. It was a queer complication. The grave, the mourning, the esteem, the sense of her own unworthiness before Mr. Hepburn, none of these things had any foundation in fact.

The poor old lady, without knowing it, must

have been in much the same frame of mind in which that dark luminary was, when he wrote:

"All that we see or seem,
Is a dream within a dream."

It was so hard for her to grasp facts which combined to upset all the credulity and all the teaching of her life.

Meanwhile, at Glene, a terrible domestic storm gathered and burst. Mr. Hepburn had not recognized in the plump, rosy old lady, standing by the side of his young wife, the love of his youth—the woman he had been hiding from so long. He had turned away really and truly because he had a reason for turning away, not because he desired to avoid her. No qualm of fear or conscience assailed him. There was no trace left of the loving, lovely girl he had left, in the old lady before him.

But when he met his wife an hour after, it did occur to him to ask her the meaning of the appearance of this stranger.

"It was Mrs. Scorrier," she said, boldly. "I thought you were going to be out till evening, and that it would be a good opportunity of showing her the house without offending

you with the sight of her—though why you disliked meeting that poor harmless——"

"You have dared to disobey me!" He almost roared these words at her, forgetting all his usual courtesy of manner, and approaching her with a fierceness that made her fear for one terrible moment that he was going to strike her. "You have dared to disobey me! you have done what will cause you grief to your life's end."

"What have I done? oh, Mr. Hepburn, don't look at me so; you are so fond of her son that I thought, I thought——"

She stopped, unable to tell him what she had thought. Unable to check a trembling which had seized her. Unable to prevent most painful suspicions entering her mind.

He did not tell her what she had done. He did not tell her who that woman was. He did not notice her terrors and agitation. What he did do was to walk about the room, foreboding evil in broken sentences, and sometimes watching Amelia as if she had been a disobedient child. By-and-by she retorted, roused herself to reply to and sting him by a series of sharp

surmises, the bare possibility of which being true made her feel very heart-sore and ill. "I love my reputation, even if I don't love you, as you hint," she said at last; "and now I believe that to be in danger. I believe this Mrs. Scorrier knows something about you—that you have a first wife living perhaps."

When his wife said that, Mr. Hepburn felt that it would be a better thing to be a bigamist even, than to be what he felt himself.

They had a miserable evening; for, in their wrath, and fear, and dread, they had said many sharp and cruel things to each other. But a stop was put to their wrangling when Amelia was taken very ill, and Arthur Scorrier was sent for.

It bowed the father's heart with grief, and his head with shame, when, after a short interval of agony and solitude, his eldest son came and announced to him the premature birth of an heir to Glene.

He had been very false, very base and mean, very cowardly and unmanly, in planning and carrying out that system of deception which had for thirty years been practised success-

fully. But he was punished for it now, with as heavy a punishment as one human being even can desire to see inflicted upon another. When once he had made himself dead to the woman who had known him as Scorrier, it had seemed to him that there was no going back, that no repentance and attempted amendment of the false step could be of any avail. And for several years he did not very earnestly desire to alter what he considered unalterable. But when he made himself known to Arthur in the guise of his father's friend, his punishment commenced. For he soon learnt to love the boy, and the boy loved him, and his heart yearned towards his son, and throbbed with renewed tenderness towards that son's mother. But he had made her mourn for him as dead by means of a lie too long for him to go back and show himself to her in his true colours. Moreover, he had built up for himself such a character for honourable aversion to the follies of young men,—such a reputation for high-minded morality, and Christian virtue, that he did not like to raze it to the ground by unveiling the peccadiloes of his

earlier manhood. So the evil had grown day by day, year by year, until it had assumed proportions that threatened to crush him, should it ever be discovered.

And it was threatened with discovery now, It was not in the heart of any woman to endure such a wrong as he had inflicted in silence. She would denounce him, and he would go down to the grave dishonoured among men, and despised by Arthur. And looking at his acts, and not seeing any remorse, no man would believe in his repentance.

"The son of the bond-woman may not be heir with the son of the free." He quoted the same words which fell from her lips in shame later that night, when she heard the tidings. "But Arthur, my son! my son! dearer to me than this child of my old age will ever be, I will repair the wrong to you." In the confusion of his mind he thought that money could do it.

CHAPTER II.

IN PERIL.

The next day old Mrs. Scorrier, as I must still call her in this history, went back to Penzance, and Mr. Hepburn knew that she had done so without making a sign when he met Arthur. For Arthur was the same as ever, the well-reputed impostor told himself, with a sigh of such intense relief as proved to himself even that he had passed a night of mortal dread.

If he had passed a night of mortal dread, poor old Mrs. Scorrier had passed a night in which the cruelty of the case had forced itself upon her consideration crushingly. When once she had made up her mind that, apart from all other motives, she must spare Arthur's father for Arthur's sake, she quickly resolved upon a line of action. She would spare him, she would remove herself from his vicinity, she

would never stab him through this younger woman, who had the legal right to him and to his name. But she could not live any longer on his bounty; on this she was resolved. It would be better to go back and ask for a roof to cover her and for bread to eat from the family who had cast her off, if Arthur could not support her, than go on accepting this silence-money as she would feel it to be now.

Her money was vested in a west of England bank, and Arthur knew her business better than she did herself. It would be necessary therefore to offer some explanation to Arthur about her Quixotic intention of refusing to take the interest as usual. This explanation she attempted to give in her farewell interview with her son. He introduced the subject almost by saying—

"I shall have to come upon you for a hundred pounds in a few days, mother; my expenses have got ahead of my receipts lately, and I'm stumped for ready money."

"Oh, Arthur!" she gasped.

"Don't look so shocked about it; Cissy and

I are going to retrench and do all sorts of economical things presently, and we shall be as right as possible next year; but just in the meantime we shall find it tight work."

"But I don't understand how you can so soon have got into difficulties; you know that I have I would give you, but——"

He looked vexed, but he tried to speak and laugh carelessly as he answered:

"Don't preach, mother dear; I acknowledge I've been going on a wrong plan—sailing under falsely prosperous colours for the sake of increasing the practice; the wedding-trip dipped into a good round sum, and those Florentine mosaics——"

"You ought to have been a millionnaire to be justified in getting such things," Mrs. Scorrier said, with as near an approach to severity as she was capable of. Then she remembered that the first-born son of the owner of Glene ought to be in a position to gratify such tastes, and she softened and humbled herself before him.

"My poor dear boy, don't think I blame you, but do be a little careful, and don't hide

your money-troubles from your wife; as for the hundred pounds, you shall have it at once." During this brief talk with Arthur she had banished the resolve in which she had taken comfort—the resolve to return with scorn the price-money her false lover had paid to her. To do so would have been soothing to the outraged heart and pride. But both her heart and pride were in subjection to her son. For his sake she could continue to accept what would have debased her in her own estimation had Arthur's well-being not been in question. For his sake she could continue to take silently what Mr. Hepburn had deemed a fair equivalent to that which he had cost her.

It can easily be understood how hateful Penzance and all the associations of Penzance were to her mind now. There would no longer be a solemn solace in the roaring of the sea. There would no longer be comfort in that weekly visit to the grave. "That weekly visit." What was she thinking about? A stranger slept in it, and she would never visit it again. Above all, there would no longer be the purely feminine pleasure in talking about

the dear deceased which she had taken when discussing things past and present with her quiet respectable old friends.

Still for all this she determined that she would stay on and endure at Penzance. She would not give rise to wonder and doubt in the minds of the few who would wonder and doubt about her, by removing from a place to which she had always declared herself rooted. Besides, where could she go to improve the position? She could not have a home near her son while her son had a home near his father. She could not go back to the Wilmots now that she knew herself in truth to be nothing more than a cast-off pensioned mistress. And she could not pitch her tent in a strange place without assigning a reason for desiring to do so. So, strong in her sense of what was due to Arthur, she practised another piece of self-abnegation. She went back to Penzance with every memory and every feeling rebelling against her doing so. And if she was "infirm of purpose," there was surely something heroic in her being it.

In addition to the romantic wrong of her

youth, in addition to the sorrowful strain which had been upon her for long years, in addition to the humiliating and astounding revelation which had just been so unwittingly made to her, the poor old lady had another anxiety. Things were not going well with Arthur. He would never have come to her and drawn upon her willing heart and slender means if he had not been sorely pressed. She could not bear to be hard upon Arthur's wife, but in her innermost mind she did charge that innocent one with all manner of extravagances.

Poor Cissy! Inconveniences and unpleasantnesses thickened about her at this juncture. Just at a time when, by reason of the pressure of financial anxiety, her husband contrasted less favourably with his former self and with other men than he might have done, she was subjected to the continual presence of Mr. Lister, the old love, who was free from all such anxieties. Just when, by reason of Arthur's absorption in other and weightier matters, her own interest for him seemed to be on the wane, she was shown the picture of that old love feeling an intense interest in another woman.

For Mr. Lister was quite human enough to like to have his vanity fed by the sight of a pretty woman obviously expectant of an offer of marriage from him, and gratefully intent upon showing herself to him in her fairest phase until it pleased him to make her such an offer.

It must be acknowledged that this was the position of affairs at Danebury at this time. Isabelle was not pursuing him, and not making love to him, and not doing many of the other things which women are generally ready to charge one another with doing; but she was just what has been said, obviously expectant of an offer of marriage from, and intent upon showing herself in her fairest phase to, Mr. Lister.

It is a very difficult thing to draw the line between the means that are justifiable and those that are unjustifiable in such a case as this, when the actors are a young man and woman, and the possible end marriage. It is very hard to say what allurements are in good taste, and what are in bad taste. It might, perhaps, in a more tolerant-spirited world, be laid down as a rule that those that answer

might be considered justifiable and in good taste. But until this world we live in is more tolerant-spirited, girls on promotion must pass under a heavy fire from the guns of their enemies, and cannot expect always to escape stray shots from their allies.

The blonde Bayswater belle, with the fawn-coloured hair and eyes, fought her battle quite in the open, under the observation of all such as took the trouble to observe her. She blushed with bright, happy, undisguised emotional pleasure whenever she heard he was coming or caught sight of him after an absence. She always took the tone in conversation which she had learnt from experience was the tone he best liked to hear. She made his views her own, she bore with Mrs. Blayne in the blandest manner, because Mrs. Blayne was a means of approaching him. And he took pleasure in the transparent flattery while he seemed to ignore it, and gave Cissy to understand that, kind and gracious, fair and frank as Miss Vargrave was, his taste revolted against such extremely kind graciousness in a wife.

"If she would only weary of him and of our village-life and go home, what a relief it would be to me," she would say both to herself and to her husband after some meeting with Mr. Lister, when Isabelle had been more than ordinarily hopeful of the handkerchief being thrown.

"Why don't you hint to her that he's only humbugging?" Arthur would say.

"It's not a pleasant office that of hinting to a girl that she is being humbugged, as you call it; besides——"

"Besides what?" he asked, as Cissy paused.

"I can't be really sure that he is; I have no reason, only an instinct, against her very warm reception of his attentions."

"You could hardly, as you say, speak on the strength of that alone," Arthur said, thoughtfully; "your interference would perhaps be attributed to jealousy."

"Not by him, and surely never by you, Arthur," she said, quickly. "I declare all the steps I take to put distance between myself and such a possibility seem to bring the suspicion of it nearer. I'm fond of Isabelle, but

I'll see her sacrificed to his vanity rather than feed it by the sacrifice of my own self-respect."

"I only wish he would have done philandering, and ask her to have him, since she is so eager to do it," Arthur said, carelessly. "He's a fine fellow, and I can't dislike him; still I am getting tired of his shaking hands with me in a way that says 'Am I not a noble-minded fellow to shake hands with you at all?'"

"And I am tired of seeing him shake hands with you, I can assure you, though I don't see what you fancy you see in his manner. I shall be glad when he is gone—heartily, heartily glad of it."

Then Arthur Scorrier made a mistake. The old love was not a love to her any more: all the romance with which she had invested him personally was brushed off him by this reunion. All the romance was brushed off him personally, but not off the period which he had illuminated. It jarred upon her that her husband should say he "quite understood it; Lister was not at all the sort of man who

would have suited or made her happy even if they had married." This unconscious attempt to put Lister down into the common-place reacted painfully.

Soon after this, as his wife refused to give the aid of her intervention to that young and struggling power Isabelle, Arthur Scorrier himself undertook the task. He performed it in the way in which people do generally perform works of supererogation — that is to say, he rebuked and exhorted the wrong person.

"As you're away from your father's house, and under my care, in a measure, I may as well tell you that I don't like this sort of thing, Belle," he began.

"Neither do I," Isabelle answered, promptly. They were driving through a monotonously straight level lane at the time, Isabelle having consented to accompany him on one of his professional rounds. "I don't like it at all. Good as your springs are, these rucks disagree with my London bones."

"I mean—and you know it very well—that I don't like this flirting with Mr Lister."

"I am not flirting with him; if I was

going to marry him to-morrow, I couldn't behave differently," she said; and, to say truth, her graciousness and kindness could scarcely have been improved upon, even by a bride-elect.

"But as you are not going to marry him to-morrow," he urged.

"That's not my fault, is it?" she said, half in fun, half in earnest.

"Why in the world can't he say what he wants, and have done with it!" Arthur went on. "He's always at our heels—at yours or at Cissy's—and you like him, and there's nothing to prevent his marrying a wife, or a dozen wives, for the matter of that."

"Perhaps he will say what he wants before long. Meantime, I can't help it, can I? I don't affect indifference, or any folly of that sort."

And as she spoke she thought of a number of impressionable young beings whom even her indifference had not kept at bay for so long a time as Mr. Lister had kept himself back; and she felt sorry for herself, and, as was natural, rather annoyed with the one who caused her to feel these things.

The girl, in consequence of Arthur Scorrier's ill-advised interference, felt on her honour now to compass Mr. Lister's conquest by fair means or foul.

On the one hand, as far as she could see, there was every inducement for her to strive to win. Mr. Lister was well-off, well-looking, well-placed. Once married to him, she could with impunity indulge several of those tastes of hers which had been checked at home lately for want of means. On the other hand, if she failed, there would be the smarting sense of signal defeat to endure before those who were well aware of how she had been striving; those who had prognosticated possible failure and preached prudence to her. Additionally, there would be the obligation upon her of going away from them and the scenes of her lost battle; going away back to the home that was in the throes of attempted retrenchment. Moreover —and this settled the question as to which line she should take—she had coquetted herself into a tolerably warm feeling of attachment for Mr. Lister.

"I hope I have not hurt your feelings,"

Mr. Scorrier said, kindly looking down at the fair flushed face by his side—the face that, in spite of its owner's foretaste of humiliation, was still upraised very haughtily and self-confidently.

"No, not at all," she answered, with a quick, decided shake of the head; "my feelings are not so delicate—so unhealthy, rather—as to be hurt by every adverse wind that ruffles them."

"You can't think that I have any other motive than your welfare in speaking as I have spoken, Belle?" Arthur Scorrier said, in some surprise at the tone she was taking.

"That is what people always say when they administer black draughts, bitter cups, and good advice," Isabelle replied, carelessly. "Pray don't say any more about it, Arthur; or, if you must say more about it, regulate your speech by the remembrance that if I had the will, I haven't the power to answer you satisfactorily, and that, to tell the truth, I haven't the will."

It was a pettish, girlish, inconsequent culmination of the grandiloquently commenced

speech. After she had uttered it, Isabelle felt that it would be an immense relief to them both when their enforced companionship was over. If she had been in town, she could have lounged back in the comfortable wagonnette, and have looked as if she were interested in the shop-windows and the passers-by. But in these country roads, where there were no passers-by, much less any shop-windows, it would have had the air of being sulky had she lounged back and adverted her gaze. Accordingly, as to be sulky, in her creed of polite faith, was to be ill-bred, and to be silent was to be sulky, she tried a few commonplace remarks concerning the hedges and ditches, and delivered them in a hard, dry way, that was eminently aggravating to the man who had been led by his anxiety that she should make no mistake, into giving her wholesome but unpalatable advice. Meanwhile, parallel with the train of thought that produced the commonplace remarks there ran a strictly private train, freighted with the following intention;—

"They shall all find themselves mistaken, even if I *have* to stoop to conquer!"

The spring went by. The days lengthened themselves into summer, and the *dramatis personæ* of this drama of life were still placed where they had been when the young May moon was beaming, and the Glene baby was born. That frail atom of humanity had developed some trifling degree of strength by the time the year had grown "lush in juicy stalks." And when Autumn bold, "with universal tint of sober gold," was over the land, the little heir of the Hepburns had been heard to crow, and had even hazarded a smile.

The advent of the infant did not tend to greatly increase the happiness and harmony of the inhabitants of the great house. His mother could not forget the row, and the half revelation which preceded his birth. And she was by nature a woman who harped much verbally upon anything that had once jarred in her mind, so now she perplexed Mr. Hepburn with many adroitly put leading questions, placed pit-falls for his memory, and caught him in them continually, until Mr. Hepburn smarted under an unceasing sensation of fear of being found out.

That there were secrets in this man's life, the wife of his bosom could not doubt. Secrets of sorrow and secrets of shame. She did not seek to lure him into confidences concerning them for the sake of comforting him. She tried to trip him up, that he might fall prone before her, and that she might then trample upon and express some of her real feelings about him. But though his feet were often in perilous places he had not quite fallen up to the present date, and Amelia was still on the watch.

His feet were very often in perilous places lthough a great and most comforting assurance had reached him. Back in the spring, soon after Mrs. Scorrier's return to Penzance, he had received a letter in a handwriting that was unfamiliar to him, and yet about which, at the same time, there was an association as of something he had once known. It was to this effect:

"For Arthur's sake I will be dumb and blind. Dumb about these past thirty-one years, blind as to what I saw in the gallery of Glene."

This letter was unsigned. Mr. Hepburn

burnt it, with a blessing on the head of the writer, and a muttered thanksgiving for his brisk deliverance from fear.

His feet were very often in perilous places still, though this letter had been received, and its fullest meaning taken in. They threatened to lead him into danger, especially when some trouble came upon Arthur, which he would not confide to the father who was yearning to help him. "It's something beyond the reach of friendship, sir," Arthur would say, with a forced laugh, when he was too closely pressed as to the cause of his moodiness. In the first pangs of his outraged sensitive pride the young man did not like to acknowledge that he had, to all outward seeming, verified the truth of the old adage which declares that a fool and his money are soon parted. He did not like to confess, in fact, that he had got deeply into debt, and had not a well-founded hope of getting out of it soon. So he turned tender questionings aside with careless answers, and Mr. Hepburn was often nearly tottering out of his secrets to an unguarded place, out of sympathy for his son.

Amelia, too, was sympathetic to Arthur—hideously sympathetic, he thought—as he did not like her; horribly sympathetic her husband fancied, who had a secret thought. The cool-headed young woman, who had been so wise and so good in the days of her maidenhood, was rather less true to herself now in her matronhood. She was no heart-strong, head-strong creature, who would be willing to burst all bonds, and fling out over the traces, between which she was compelled to amble by Mr. Hepburn. But still in her own frigid fashion she was moved to unseemly demonstrations in favour of Arthur Scorrier. He was the one creature on earth that she did like and admire, and sometimes her admiration and liking passed those bounds which she had made it her custom to observe. Not that she was ever really indiscreet or undutiful in action. But all things are relative, and her coolest manner to Arthur was sultry compared with her manner to others. Arthur's wife saw it and laughed at it to herself and to her cousin; secure at least, in so far that she could hold her own against any Amelia-power that might be

brought to bear upon her husband. And Mr. Hepburn saw it, and accepted it as part of his punishment, not fearing much, it must be admitted, since he was secure in Amelia's coldness and Arthur's integrity. As for Isabelle, she did not see it. All the rest of the world might have coveted their neighbours' wives, provided only Mr. Lister was left free and untrammelled to marry her in the good time coming.

CHAPTER III.

"I FELT SURE OF IT."

THERE is an expression that we often use, "Playing her (or their) cards very well," with respect to girls and their families, when the former are in the matrimonial mart, and often use erroneously as a reproach. If the cards are theirs to play, small blame to them, in common sense and Christian charity, if they play them well. There are some of us who have held them in early days, and who have still lost the trick, and never one by honours; and who have to feed upon our own hearts during the remainder of our lives in silence and sadness in consequence of our mistakes. Some have missed a lead, and others have revoked, and others have finessed far too finely. At all events, the cards that were dealt were not played well, and all have retired at the end of the game losers of more or less.

It must be conceded to Isabelle Vargrave that she did play the cards that were dealt to her very well indeed. These cards were propinquity, opportunity, youth, beauty, fine weather, lovely scenery, and a strong determination to win. If Mr. Hepburn's feet were often in perilous places, so were Mr. Lister's as he came week after week to the Scorriers' house, and still found Isabelle there.

For Mrs. Scorrier, sensible Cissy, would not be the Platonic friend, fraught with memories of the past, which he desired to make her. She would not discuss vague prospects which he was fond of chalking out, nor would she vaguely regret and dismally remember. Or if she did these latter things she would not do them aloud, which comes to the same thing. Still he hankered after her, still he loved to linger near her, still he strove, half unconsciously, to try and make her miserable, since he had not been permitted to make her happy.

And very well he succeeded in doing that which he strove to do. She saw that his presence was distasteful to her husband, yet she refrained from banishing that presence out

of gratitude to the Vargraves, who might be relieved of the expensive luxury of a daughter by his means. For Isabelle declared herself to be most perfectly satisfied with the march of events, and Cissy tried to hope that her cousin had good ground for being so. Still instinct and not vanity, told her that she herself was the magnet to which that needle turned most truly.

He had taken a shooting-box in the neighbourhood now, and had settled himself in it avowedly for a year, and he had instituted a series of festivities, from which the Scorriers found themselves unable to shake free, by reason of the very intensity of their desire to do so.

"The Den," his place was called—an incongruous little pile of building that stood in strict seclusion in the triangular space that was left between three large woods, which stretched away to some distance in their several directions, rendering him secure from all untoward and chance observation.

Mr. Lister established himself here very comfortably. Made it like a home to himself

by getting about him the inanimate surroundings that he loved. And he asked the Danebury trio to dine with him here constantly during the bright summer and autumn weather, and the Scorriers went—because Isabelle looked poutingly injured if they refused to go.

It was but a bachelor's establishment, this Den, but it was beautifully appointed, and would be a pleasant place to come and play the *grande dame* to Cissy in, in the days to come, Isabelle thought.

There were only two rooms on the ground-floor, besides the kitchen, from which the very successful little dinners emanated, and these two rooms were very small and low, were but models in miniature, in fact, of those to which her taste inclined. Still Isabelle spent some of her most excitedly happy hours in them. For her host was always more gallant and attentive, more devoted to, and regardful of, her apparently, in his own house than out of it.

One evening they were dining with him, and the Blaynes were to meet them. It had been felt as a slight relief, both by Arthur and

Cissy, this coming there this night, for they had passed a most doleful day in Danebury. The morning's post had brought Cissy a miserable effusion from her aunt Vargrave, begging Mrs. Scorrier to pay some of the bills which had been incurred in procuring her *trousseau*, as she (Mrs. Vargrave) had not a penny wherewith to defray them, and the unconscionable tradespeople were getting clamorous. "I dare not ask your uncle for further supplies," the unhappy bewildered lady wrote, "as I can give no account of the money he gave me for the purpose; it seemed to go before I could count it, so most likely I have been terribly cheated somewhere. Indeed, it would be no use my asking your uncle, even if I had put down things—for business seems to be going badly, and we are anything but well off. I shall be very glad to hear of our dear Isabelle settling well, and I hope that as she is staying so long with you, that there is a prospect." When Cecile read that, she made up her mind to two things. First, that her uncle should never be called upon to pay another penny for her; and secondly, that neither Arthur nor herself would

interpose the smallest obstacle to the fulfilment of Isabelle's designs, and Mrs. Vargrave's hopes.

Hesitatingly, with a feeling of embarrassment—that she was quick to feel and denounce as pitiful—she took her aunt's letter, and showed it to her husband, and asked him "What she had better do about those bills?"

"Pay them—when you can, dear," he said, flushing up a little.

"But,"—she began, and then checked herself. He knew as well as she did that she had come to him without a penny, and that no penny had come to her since. Yet here was he now recommending her to pay away large sums of money and not saying a word as to where the large sums of money were to come from.

"What is it, Cissy dear?" he asked.

"You forget," she said, trying to rally her spirits, and look up,—

> 'Barefooted stood the beggar-maid
> Before the King Cophetua?'

"King Cophetua himself must pay for my boots. I ought to have stood barefooted before

you, Arthur, until I knew whether you could pay for me or not." And then she gave up the attempt to rally her spirits, and to speak as if she did not feel deeply, and let her face droop into her hands.

How he cursed his own folly and his extravagance, and, above all, his want of ready money, as he bent over her, tenderly caressing her, and beseeching her to be his bright-hearted, bright-faced wife again. How he lamented his want of professional success, and hated that partner of his who seemed to be gradually superseding him. How he longed to apply to Mr. Hepburn, his rich generous friend, and at once relieve himself and Cissy from this ignominious suffering. "And I will do it to-morrow, too," he said to himself at last. "A big sum owed to him won't harass me as these perpetual annoyances about small debts do."

He did not confide his intention to Cissy, but he bade her be happy and of good cheer, for that without fail he would shortly have it in his power to gild her path again. "Meanwhile, —yes, meanwhile, you had better write to your

aunt, and set her mind at ease about both affairs," Cissy, he said.

"But I can't set her mind at ease about Isabelle," Cissy said, getting scarlet.

"Why not? I think he means her now. Until lately, I have thought that it was only she meant him, and that would be no good; but she's quite pretty enough, and nice enough, to do for any fellow whose heart is free, you know, Cissy."

"Yes." Cissy assented to this proposition, but she thought at the same time that pretty and nice as Isabelle was, it was not by such a woman that she (Cissy) should have been superseded.

However, she went with Arthur and Isabelle to the Den that afternoon, and found relief in the change, and in the actual presence of the possibility for which they were all watching. Found relief in the beauty of the woods and the crispness of the October air; in the swirling sound which the pheasants made as they were startled from the tree. Found relief in Mr. Blayne's still admiring regard for her, which was always shattered before it could be pro-

perly demonstrated by the keen observation of his wife. Found relief from the pressure of anxiety even in Mrs. Blayne's aimless twaddle, since she was not compelled to reply to it. Above all, found relief in the conviction that if Lister married her pretty fawn-coloured cousin, at least the pair would remove themselves and their happiness out of her orbit.

They had come to the Den early this afternoon by the especial desire of their host, in order to see brown October in all his glory in the adjacent covers. That host came sauntering forward from the door to meet them, as Arthur drove into the triangular space of ground between the trees, and as in courtesy bound, help the married woman to the ground first. It must be stated here that clear-sighted as women generally are on this point, Isabelle had hitherto never once seen, nor had she fancied, anything antagonistic to her own designs in Mr. Lister's manner towards her cousin. It had not, in fact, occurred to her to be jealous. But this afternoon she caught the expression of his face as he turned to her

from welcoming Mrs. Scorrier, and she saw a light that she had never kindled there, fade from it.

The girl's heart ached heavily for a moment as she thought of how all the good things seemed to be given to Cissy. "The love of her husband ought to be enough for her; she shall not even be tempted to prize his," Isabelle thought as she sprang down, and her mind revolved in an instant round sundry incidents to which she had never before condescended to give a thought. He was admiring Cissy—almost loving her, and he had for some time been admiring and almost loving her—Isabelle! Miss Vargrave nearly choked with wrath and indignation that this should have happened when she was by, free. But she calmed herself with the reflection that it was probably only the idle natural depravity of his heart, leading him not exactly to covet his neighbour's wife, but to find her the fairest! By the time she had satisfactorily settled this point with her own wounded self-love, Mr. Lister, feeling painfully conscious that he had half betrayed himself to this girl, was by her side again, and Arthur

and Cissy had gone on into the house in search of the Blaynes.

The pair stood alone in the glow of an October afternoon. They were both handsome—and one of them was sufficiently young for the future to be everything to her. She had good cards in her hands, and she began playing them well. The others had left her in this place, but it would be her own fault if she did not make the most of it.

"Those woods are too tempting," she said, turning away and sniffing the breeze that came rustling through the red-gold leaves that were fast dropping.

"Why too tempting?" he asked; and as he asked it, he did most heartily wish that Miss Vargrave had not developed an enthusiasm for the beauties of nature just then.

"Because they make me want to go into them, and I can't," she said, in a tone of plaintive ill-usage.

"Why not?" he said.

"I dare not go by myself, and Cissy would not thank me for dragging her through that undergrowth."

"Then let me be your cicerone," he said, fervently hoping that she would remember his whole duty as host was not towards herself alone.

But Isabelle had certain cards to play, and she played them without any compunction.

"If you will come with me, of course I shall not be afraid—and you'll be ever so much better than Cissy, because you can take care of me," she said, looking up into his face with that elaborate simplicity which seems to be a specialty of the plump, wide-eyed, broad-browed, "one-coloured" English girl.

"There are neither satyrs nor gnomes to protect you from," he said, rather sulkily, plunging into the forest path after her. "Keep to the open ground as far as you can, Miss Vargrave—stick to the path, the broadest path, for the others twist and turn about bewilderingly."

For a short time Isabelle obeyed his injunctions. She kept to the broadest path, and contented herself with running no greater risks than catching her foot in ivy trails, and her hair against overhanging boughs. But this grew tame after a time, and she glided

almost imperceptibly into a less well-marked way.

Presently she looked round over her shoulder at him, and said—

"Do you know? no, you *don't* know—but I will tell you, I was very heavy-hearted when I came over here; this wind through the trees will blow away cobwebs."

"What made you heavy-hearted?" he asked, with the affable contempt that is irritating to a person who happens to be in earnest.

"'It was only the sorrow of others,
Cast its shadows over me,'"

the girl sang out, laughingly; "Cissy had the blues, and I followed suit."

"Was she heavy-hearted?" he asked, eagerly.

"She! Who? Mrs. Scorrier? Yes; a friend of former days," the girl went on, half undesignedly, "was in trouble, and wrote to Cissy about it, and Cissy got the letter this morning, and on the receipt of it had the blues."

The young lady was not telling wilful falsehoods, but she was most assuredly painting

the lily of truth in making this statement as to the cause of Cissy's dejection. She certainly was not called upon to confess that it was her own mother who was the old friend of Cissy's in trouble, nor did the exigencies of the situation demand that she should declare aloud the nature of that trouble in which her mother was. But she certainly was not compelled to state part of the truth and withhold the explanatory part—the extenuating part, I had almost written, until I recalled to my mind this fact, that Cissy was not called upon to "extenuate aught" to Mr. Lister.

He walked on by the politic young lady's side, wondering how much she would confide to him in the ardour and unsophistication of youth; wondering what other "old friend" it could be who had the power to submerge bright Cissy in melancholy by the mere recital of his misfortunes, wondering, above all, what motive this girl by his side had in hinting these things.

Theoretically this man was the very soul of honour. He had the loftiest ideas as to what it behoved human beings to do under madden-

ing circumstances. And if he fell short sometimes of that excellent exaltedness which he demanded of others, he never grew lax in word on the subject, or in thought either, to do him justice. The worst he was planning with regard to Cissy now was a Platonic friendship, which he would have laughed to scorn as a burlesque of the real thing had any one else attempted it. And as it was just now dawning upon him that the attempt was going to be a failure, he desired to lay it quietly to rest without more ado.

She played the cards that fate had dealt to her very well indeed. Let him go on thinking in silence, and with an absorbed manner, just long enough for him to feel that he had been guilty of an awkward breach of manners since he was on escort duty. As he roused himself, obedient to some reminder from her, Isabelle roused herself to the task before her, and nerved herself to the performance of it by the reflection that it was now or never with her.

She had thought a good deal, and she had hesitated a good deal, about what she was going to do. But all the immediately pre-

ceding circumstances were against her refraining from availing herself of this opportunity of doing. Cissy and herself were not quite in unison any more, and she shrank from going home unwon, after those hints, of being very violently wooed, which she had sent to her mother. Moreover, be it remembered, she loved the man she meant to marry, so she was not wholly inexcusable.

As he roused himself, he saw her beautifully rounded shoulders heaving, and her finely moulded face glowing quite close to him. She had that indescribable trick of bearing down upon people which some men find it so hard to combat. If she had been emotional a couple of yards off, he would have felt safe. But as she had elected to be emotional close to his side, he did wish for the protecting presence of a third person.

He was a great fool; any man is a fool who suffers himself to be trapped into speech by these means, when he feels that in silence is his only safety.

"Are not the cobwebs all blown away yet?" he asked, as she lowered her head and sighed.

"No; they cling to me to-day," she said. "I regret leaving places, and feel leaving people very much indeed."

"All places and all people?" Mr. Lister asked, breaking a twig off, and heartily wishing himself out of the wood.

"No; but places where I have been happy, and people who have been kind to me."

"Every one would of necessity be kind to you, Miss Vargrave—

> 'Friends in all the old you'll find,
> And lovers in the young.'"

"I don't want indiscriminate friendship——"

"Nor yet miscellaneous love?" he interrupted. "I thought all young ladies liked to be monopolists of affection."

"Then I am unlike all young ladies. I am sorry to have seemed such a commonplace creature to you all this time that I have been thinking you understood me better than any body else has ever done."

He understood her perfectly well now. He believed her to be unsophisticated, and very fond of him, and utterly incapable of concealing the fact.

"Understood you! A man would be a brute who did not understand you," he said, warmly. He was telling himself what a much more transparent nature this girl had than that woman possessed who still held him in her chains. On the whole it must be admitted that if he had been gifted with the perspicuity with which he accredited himself in this instance, the girl would not have contrasted so favourably with the woman.

Once more, as he assured her that a man who did not understand her must be a brute, did Isabelle visibly incline towards him, in that pleading, relying way which was so difficult to deal with. She played a stronger card indeed this time; she held out her hand, and he was obliged to take it, and listen to her expressions of thankfulness for having found one appreciative friend.

"It is such a great thing in life to have one true heart to turn to, isn't it, Mr. Lister?" she said, simply, as if she had suffered much from having been buffetted about on the stormy ocean of circumstances, instead of, as was the case, having lived a life of most perfect com-

fort and security, in a prosperous suburban locality, bereft of all romance.

"My heart will always be true to you." He spoke earnestly, for he was entangled both in thought and in the brambles that were trailing about from side to side of the path into which they had strayed. "My heart will always be true to you. How could a man be other than true to you?"

"And you will be! Oh, I never thought you cared for me so much," Isabelle stuttered out, playing her last card hurriedly, in the fear she had of missing the chance of playing it at all; "and I will be true to you—true unto death."

He lacked the moral courage to look into her golden-brown eyes, and tell this girl that she was plighting her troth to him before he had asked her to do it. He did not want her, but he could not refuse her. The honour was thrust upon him, in fact; but he was too courteous by nature and habit to let it be so in seeming. So he took her hand, and pressed it, tenderly almost, and made her lean against him, while he kissed her brow, and promised to

be "true to her as she deserved—true as her own pure heart and single mind could desire."

They were some time before they could fight their way through the undergrowth back into the path that led them out of the wood. The young lady went back feeling very happy and triumphant, and the man by her side felt harassed, hampered, and fettered in a way that filled him with remorse. There was something in the air of both of them that told the tale as soon as they made their appearance.

"I will show you the room I have left my hat in," Cissy said, following her cousin rapidly upstairs. As soon as they got safely inside the door of this room, Cecile closed it firmly, and asked, as she leaned her back against it, clasping its ebony knob firmly in her hand the while, "You have something to tell me, Isabelle?"

"I am engaged to Mr. Lister," Isabelle said, her whole face radiant with the triumph at her heart.

"I felt sure of it. May God make you love each other better than all the world beside."

CHAPTER IV.

MISTAKEN JUDGMENTS.

"The rigid righteous is a fool,
The uncou' good another."

The day after Isabelle had partially accomplished her destiny in the highly satisfactory manner, to herself, which has been recorded, Cissy went over to Glene in the morning. Her own house was not the most pleasant place in the world to her this day; its whole atmosphere seemed charged with the electric fluid of authorized love. The breakfast hour had been a hard one, for Isabelle and Arthur had talked the whole time of what the former would do, and where she would go, when she was Mrs. Lister. The young lady had altered her demeanour already in that extraordinary way in which newly engaged and soon-to-be-married girls do alter their demeanour sometimes. She took things for granted especially in a way that half amused and half annoyed Cissy. "Ed-

ward has been looked upon as invulnerable, he tells me," Miss Vargrave said, spicing fact with fiction.

"Have you the comfortable conviction that you are the only one his heart has thought of for a minute?" Cissy said, trying hard not to think her cousin an insolent pretender.

"Well! the first since his boyhood, I believe," Isabelle said, with happy confidence. "I'm almost glad it is settled, do you know, Cissy—though that stage of certain uncertainty was very nice."

"I should think you are glad it is settled," Cissy said, indignantly; "don't pretend to be only 'almost' glad; it was the infinite relief in your face that told me the truth when you came in from that ramble in the woods."

"Relief! happiness, if you like; but it was not relief, because I have never had any doubt about how it would end. I told Arthur long ago, didn't I, Arthur?"

"For all that, I had a good many doubts myself," Arthur said, laughing; "but you have managed very well, Isabelle."

"There was not much management required,

fortunately for me, for I should have been sure to have blundered," Isabelle replied. "Come, Arthur, I should have thought that you at least would have known from experience that it isn't the woman who has to manage these little matters; ours isn't managed yet, by the way. I have said yes, but there is Papa to ask."

"Uncle James is likely to say no to Mr. Lister, of course," Cissy said, in reply.

"No, my dear Cissy, I don't say that; but I like the proper forms to be gone through. Think of my prudence and propriety; Edward wanted me to ride with him this morning, but I said 'No, not till Papa's answer comes.'"

"Very prudent, indeed; Papa's answer can only be given to the definite question that clinches the nail," Arthur Scorrier said; "really though, Belle, I don't think you have any cause of anxiety," he added, in a most comforting strain. "I don't think Lister will love and ride away. What are you going to do this morning, girls?"

"I am going to sketch this house from the summer-house at the bottom of the garden," Isabelle said, demurely; "and Mr. Lister is

going to put in a few of his best touches, so as to make it worthy of Cissy's acceptance."

"And I am going to see Amelia," Cissy said, jumping up, impatiently. This projected drawing-lesson seemed such a mockery of those which a young ardent man had given a young ardent girl ten years ago at Baden Baden.

"How savage Mrs. Hepburn will be when she hears of my good fortune," Isabelle said, laughing; "she has lived in hopes, all these months, of seeing me deserted, I know; tell her it's settled, Cissy, will you?"

Mrs. Scorrier took her departure for Glene before Mr. Lister arrived that morning. She had done all that was right the day before, on going down stairs after the brief confidence with Isabelle. She had gone swiftly and steadily up to him, and swiftly and steadily she had uttered some conventional words of congratulation. But through his own embarrassment he saw hers, and he read that she did not like the engagement into which he had drifted.

"I shall never forget that you were the first

to offer me good wishes," he had said, in reply; and Isabelle had wondered why his memory was eternally to be charged with such a trifling and natural circumstance.

But though Mrs. Scorrier had said all that was conventional and kind, proper and polite, the day before, she did not feel inclined to be called upon to repeat herself this morning. So she went over, and invited herself to luncheon with Amelia, and won her welcome from that lady by giving her the earliest news of the engagement.

"So she really has caught him; well, she has played her cards well," Amelia exclaimed, when the fact was announced to her. After the manner of women she took it for granted that the girl had been the active agent in bringing the affair to a happy conclusion. "Do tell me how she managed, Cissy. I suppose you have all been helping it on?"

"Indeed I have not," Cissy said, tartly.

"Oh! I thought you had, being so happy yourself," Amelia said, with a small sneer, that would have had a more telling effect on her hearer if the latter had happened to be

looking at her. "Now as for me," the mistress of Glene continued, with a harsh laugh, "I have not had such a pleasant experience of the holy state of matrimony myself, as to make me wish to lead any unfortunate friend into it."

She began saying this with much bitterness in her tone, and Cissy's taste revolted against the woman who could bare her wound needlessly—against the wife in whom there was no pride of wifehood left. But before she had finished speaking, the bitterness fled from her voice, and some of the hardness vanished from her face, and evidently there reigned a softer feeling within her. Her little child, the little weakly heir of Glene, had been carried in his nurse's arms along the path before the window, and the mother was reigning for a few moments.

"Poor Amelia!" Cissy said, with a sort of scornful pity, all the meaning of which Mrs. Hepburn was very quick to feel; "how wrong we all are about everything; we thought yours such a brilliant prospect, that we expected miracles about it—it never could be dimmed, we all seemed to feel."

"And now I seem to feel that it never

can be brightened," Amelia said, in a sudden burst of confidence. "Even my child is a failure—yes, he is—don't think me quite a wretch for saying so, but he is. I can't concentrate all my interests and all my hopes on that poor little weakly boy; and as for Mr. Hepburn, he positively writhes under his knowledge of the child's weakliness; it's painful to see him when he is looking at it, he seems to be eaten up with remorse."

"But why should he be remorseful about an accident?" Cissy asked.

Amelia shook her head, impatiently, as she repeated, "An accident! yes, an accident that made him shake in his shoes—your mother-in-law's presence."

"My mother-in-law's presence!" Cissy reiterated, in wonderment.

"Yes, Mrs. Scorrier's coming here surreptitiously was the cause of all the mischief; my husband, saint as he is, has had close connection with sinners, I can't help thinking, and perhaps Mrs. Scorrier holds the key to some mystery which he has made; that's my reading of his repugnance to see her."

Cissy listened eagerly, and remembered the miniature of her own mother, which she had traced into Mr. Hepburn's possession. She threw her mind back to the events of the past, and failed to find any clue to that possession. Then she said,—"What mystery do you think he has made, Amelia? No, that is not a fair question to ask an angry wife," she added, hurriedly.

"Yes, it is a fair question, now that you have forced me to take time about answering it; his mystery is not about himself, but about his sister."

"His sister! Cecilia? the one whose death we read—" Cissy said.

"Yes, the one who was made dead in the family records, but whom I believe to be alive to this day."

"Amelia, what do you mean?"

"I have found out something," Mrs. Hepburn said, triumphantly; "I hold a fact or two in the hollow of my hand now, that gives me a good deal of power over Mr. Hepburn, if ever I like to use it. Do you remember that day we were at Redford, having a talk at lun-

cheon about a miniature he had left at a jeweller's ?"

"Yes." Cissy remembered, and tingled at the remembrance.

"Well, I went back there, and looked at it. I mean, that I had to go back there, and I happened to see it; it was a remarkably lovely face, wasn't it?"

"Yes," Cissy said, trembling a little, "a remarkably lovely face—a face that once seen, either in the flesh or in painting, can never be forgotten."

"I felt sure she was a Hepburn directly I saw her. I knew—"

"Felt sure she was a Hepburn!" Cissy cried.

"Yes, there could be no doubt of that: the only question was in how close a degree. I made up my mind to get an answer to that question—and I have got it."

Cissy could not ask "how" or "what the answer was;" she could only remember that her mother—her own mother—was the original of that fair painting on ivory which had so stimulated Mrs. Hepburn's curiosity.

"I found out, and made friends with, the

oldest woman on the Glene estate," Mrs. Hepburn went on; "an old Mrs. Porter, the grandmother of Porter, at the Danebury side lodge; she has known the family for nearly seventy years. She remembers Miss Cecilia Hepburn quite well, and she has let me screw the truth out of her. Cecilia Hepburn, my husband's immaculate sister, ran away with her riding-master; she is supposed to have died at Brighton, but old Nanny Porter knows the whole story, and has told it to me."

"Ran away with her riding-master!" Cissy stuttered. "Does she know—can you tell his name?"

"No, she has forgotten his name; her brother, Miss Hepburn's brother, my husband, was her guardian, and it seems that he was off duty for a year or two in some unaccountable way, and he had always been very rigid and strict with his sister. If he's nothing else, he is moral, you know; so when she disgraced herself, he called her dead, and treated her as dead. Now this is under the seal of strictest secresy, remember, Cissy. I confide in you; don't betray me ever." Mrs. Hepburn gave

this injunction with a degree of earnestness and anxiety that proved her to be somewhat in awe of the man whose secret she had surprised and betrayed.

"And you are sure that his sister was the original of that miniature?" Cissy asked, disregarding Mrs. Hepburn's appeal. "How very strange!"

"Now that I really can't consider strange at all," Mrs. Hepburn replied; "that he should keep a beautiful painting of a beautiful face is only natural. Besides, he had been dearly fond of Miss Cissy, old Mrs. Porter tells me. He can't quite cut her out of his heart, I suppose; but he is stern and unrelenting about her dereliction from moral duty. I wonder if she is alive still?"

"No, she is dead," Cissy said, quickly; and then she remembered herself, recalled partly to the remembrance by Amelia's look of intense surprise, and she added, "I mean she most likely is dead, poor thing."

"Cissy, how seriously you take up things. Now, of course, dead or alive, she is my sister-in-law, but, honestly, I feel perfectly indifferent

as to whether she is dead or alive," Mrs. Hepburn said, scornfully. "I mean to tell Mr. Hepburn one day, when he tries me too far, that I know all about it."

"I should like to see that miniature again," Cissy said, eagerly. "Do show it to me, Amelia; it's such a romance, such a cruel romance, that I should like to have one more look at the heroine of it."

"I think it is in one of the writing-table drawers," Mrs. Hepburn said, rising as she spoke, and leading the way to Mr. Hepburn's own room—the library. "At least he always shuts that drawer in a hurry, if I go in and find it open."

"Probably it is locked," Cissy suggested, as they entered the room. For answer Mrs. Hepburn gave a vigorous tug at the brass handles, and found the suggestion verified.

A large bunch of keys was lying on the table, half concealed by some loose papers.

"It's odd if one of these don't open it," the lady of the house said; and Cissy's intense desire to see and assure herself about that painted face, overpowered her sense of honour

to the extent of causing her to offer no remonstrance. But before the right key could be found, the fear-sharpened ears of the wife heard the sound of her husband's footsteps, and, with a rapidly given hint to Cissy to "seem to be occupied with a book," Mrs. Hepburn herself walked out through the open French window on to the terrace, where her child was taking the air.

But Cissy could not "seem to be occupied with a book," or with anything else, in fact, than the subject which was uppermost in her mind. If this suave, courteous, rich old man were indeed her uncle, the only brother of that harassed, sorrow-beaten woman, whose life of lingering shame and pain had surely not been "penance vain" for the fault of her youth—she—Cissy, his niece,—would reveal herself, and make him reproach himself for his want of charity as he deserved to reproach himself. So she simply waited, standing by the table, looking strangely agitated and expectant, until he came in, and had got over his surprise at seeing her there.

There was pain and sorrow, confusion and

excitement, on her bright expressive face, and his first fear was that something had befallen that unowned son of his, to whom the tenderest part of his heart was given.

"Is anything amiss with Arthur, my dear?" he asked, eagerly, remembering only that she was his son's wife, and forgetting that the familiar address was not warranted by appearances and acknowledgement.

"Arthur is quite well. But there is something oppressing me, Mr. Hepburn,—something I have found out, which threatens me with great unhappiness."

"Found out!" His thoughts and fears were all bent towards that long criminal concealment of his own. Mabel, in spite of that letter, had betrayed him! "Found out," he repeated, sitting down in his own throne-like chair, and feeling inexpressibly small, and mean, and degraded by that concealment.

"Well, I haven't found it out, because it has been told to me," Cissy said, impatiently. "Do you recognize this?" and, as she spoke, she took from her pocket the duplicate of that miniature on ivory which he had taken to the

jeweller's to be repaired. He took it from her hand, opened it, and, at the first glance, his face grew dark-red with annoyance.

"Will you tell me what you mean by offering me a sight of this in such a way?" he asked, stiffly; and Cissy, feeling her legs shaking under her, sat down before she answered.

"Yes, I will tell you. I want you to look at my mother's face while you are listening to my story of how hardly she lived, and how sadly she died." And as she said that, poor Cissy's hardly-sustained heroism gave way, and she let her head bend down, and suffered the big sobs to be heard.

There was a long pause, during which neither of these two looked at one another. The old man's face had blanched a little, and his lips had trembled when Cissy gave him her reason for showing that likeness. But Cissy did not see those signs of emotion, and she simply thought him hard, deceitful, and stern, when he said, at last,—

"And why do you tell me this?"

"Why, indeed!" she cried, jumping up, and holding out her hand for the painting. "Why,

indeed! give it back to me, Mr. Hepburn; she was too good to be looked at lightly—too warm-hearted to be looked at coldly—too dear to me to be subjected to your scrutiny."

"Does Arthur know what you know?" he asked, hesitatingly.

"That you are her brother? No. And as I am not proud of the relationship, neither my husband nor I will make any use of it—you may rest assured of that," she said, scornfully.

"You simply assume that she was my sister from the fact of my having her likeness in my possession, Mrs. Scorrier?"

"I do nothing of the kind," Cissy said, hotly, utterly forgetting, in her wrath, the evil place Amelia would be in when her part in this discovery was brought to light. "You should have murdered old Mrs. Porter, when you murdered all your natural feelings, because your sister eloped with a riding-master."

Mr. Hepburn started. "Shall I tell you more now you know so much?" he asked, in a low voice. "In my anger, my grievous sorrow at the disgrace she had brought on our family, I would never hear the name of the man she married."

"Married?" Cissy interrupted. "You believed her to have married, and yet you were so cruel?"

"I know her to have married," he said, proudly. "She sent me her marriage certificate, and I sealed it up and put it in a drawer with some other papers that are not to be opened till after my death."

"But you will give it to me now, Mr. Hepburn?" Cissy said, imploringly. Then she changed her tone, and said, "It is my right —I insist on having it; how could you do it; never to look at it—never to return it to her—to leave her without the means of proving herself a wife—to wound her pride, which was as great and blind as your own, to the extent of causing her to live under a cloud,—you are a hard, uncharitable man, Mr. Hepburn, and you make me loathe that morality for which you have sacrificed all natural feeling. Morality! it was not even morality that made you leave your sister to privation and humiliation. My father's wife was an honourable woman,—how dared you behave as if she had been otherwise?"

"I had ruled my own life severely enough," he began; and then he remembered that the secret of the folly and sin of his youth was not quite his own any more. Mabel might confide it to her son, and then that son's wife would trample upon him, and tell him truths even more harshly than she was telling them now. So he halted in his statement, and tried another form of words.

"I had tried to rule my life according to my position and responsibilities. These latter are heavy. We are looked up to as examples; if we so much as look leniently upon an evil course, many take it." (For a few moments he forgot the possibility of being found out, and talked in the strain that had always been his.) "I demanded no more of others than I conceded to those claims and responsibilities myself. I was her guardian; I was rigorous in setting her a good example. I could forgive her now, were she alive; but then, when I was conquering inclination with duty myself, I could not do it. Let the dead past be buried still, as it has been for all these years, and try to think gently of me."

But Cissy could not think gently of him—could not tolerate his expressions of regard for herself—could not feel that his conduct was to be extenuated in any way. She took that certificate of her mother's marriage, which he had never opened, from his hand, and went her way with it to her husband, for "the dead past may be buried to others, as far as I am concerned, but it must be resuscitated for Arthur," she said. "I will tell you, though, that Amelia knows about your sister, though she doesn't know that my mother and your sister were one person. Your policy has been a cruel and false one—I think you will find it a futile one, too, after all." When she had said, she went away to her own home, and there was no peace for her there.

CHAPTER V.

"WHAT WILL CISSY THINK?"

MEANWHILE affairs had been progressing in a well-authenticated manner at the Scorriers' house—which was the stage on which the first part of Isabelle's drama of love was enacted. Miss Vargrave had chalked out a pleasant and blameless programme for the morning's entertainment of herself and her lover. The day was in her favour—at least it was favourable for the carrying out of her maidenly designs. It was a clear, crisp, October day. There was a ruddy golden hue in the atmosphere; on the trees, and over the Virginian creeper-covered walls of Arthur Scorrier's. Rich purple shadows hung over the distant hills. The air was so light and clear that the rush and murmur of distant rivers fell upon the ear soothingly. The body was braced, and the

blood brightened to a quicker flow involuntarily. Isabelle could not help feeling triumphant and buoyant on this day, that was as bright as her prospects. There had been no time since the arrangement had been come to between them for her to reflect that Mr. Lister had certainly not entered into it enthusiastically. All her thoughs centered on the happy truth that he had entered into it at all.

She put on her hat as soon as Cissy had started for Glene, and sauntered about in the garden, making a very pretty picture of "Waiting," if any one had been there to paint her. As it was, she painted herself in imagination, and felt confident that Mr. Lister could not be anything but charmed with the portrait. In her bright blue serge costume, the salient points of which were picked out with dead-white braid, with her golden fluffy hair wrapped in loose coils high upon her head, with a Watteau shepherdess hat poised just over her eyebrows, and her fawn-coloured eyes fraught with a feeling of happy success, beaming out from under the brim, Isabelle Vargrave was,

physically, at a powerful advantage this morning.

Her brain, for the first time in her life, was teeming with thought. She knew that this marriage which she was going to make, was a better one in every way than either she or her friends had ever, in their most hopeful moments, anticipated her making; she had always meant to marry money, but now, in addition to money, she had secured a man of good birth and position, of great cultivation, and considerable personal beauty. Miss Vargrave's heart swelled as she thought of how well she should look when she should be standing, covered with Honiton lace, at the altar of that church in the square, by the side of the tall, straight-limbed, stately man, whose attractions were of that speedily-recognized order that caused him to be called "a glorious fellow" by gentlepeople, and a "beautiful gentleman" by maid-servants. Her heart swelled a little more, even, as she reflected on what a much better match she was going to make than that which Cissy had made. "Not but what Arthur is a dear fellow," she thought; "but his manner

will get professional, and that I never could endure." Then she thought of how delightfully independent Mr. Lister was of all degrading professional or social considerations, and acknowledged to herself that she was a very lucky girl.

He came just as her thoughts had culminated in this decision concerning herself, and she was in her best mood to meet him. He got off his horse, and threw the reins to a groom, and came forward on the path she was walking in to meet her, and her heart ceased to swell with happiness at once. Not a shade of the triumphant joy which had been rendering her radiant all the morning was reflected in his face. He looked, on the contrary, pale, harassed, and humbled; and she quickly caught the contagion, and moved in the fetters of embarrassment.

Mr. Lister was very polite, very courteous, very kind even, in his manner to this girl, whom only the day before it had been settled should be his wife. But she would have dispensed with a little of the kindness, and with a great deal of the courtesy, if only he would

have made love to her. Miss Vargrave was well versed in the questionable art of flirting. She knew to a hair's-breadth how far to go, and when to stop, with a man in the ordinary way. But with this man, whom she was engaged to marry, she felt awkward, uncertain, and less graceful than was her wont. She was longing, little schemer as she was, for some sign of genuine, unconsidered love from him—for a touch from his hand, that should tell her in its tenderness that she was dear and precious to him—for a glance from his eyes, that should delude her into the belief that never before had he so glanced at a woman—for a word from his tongue, that might justify her in whispering passionate nothings to him in return.

And none of these encouragements were offered. Even when they had gained the seclusion and concealment of the summer-house at the end of the garden, he neglected his privileges to the extent of suffering her to work away at that sketch of Cissy's house, which was the avowed cause of their being at the extreme end of the garden. She was only a

woman, and she had never before had a legitimate object on which to expend some of the warmth of her passionate little heart. She had gone through life so gaily and merrily, on the give-and-take principle, always looking forward to the day when the reign of idle frivolity should be over, and the real monarch of her soul come to take possession of his kingdom. Now he had announced himself, and come to the gates, and she had gladly given up the key of her citadel, and still he would not enter in.

He had embraced her on the previous day, just after they had come to that arrangement which had seemed so highly satisfactory in its binding power to her then,—he had embraced her, taken her graceful, yielding form into his arms, and pressed his lips to hers ; but now it flashed back upon her that he had done it in a measured way that did not betoken an irresistible inclination to do it. Now, this morning, ignominious as some people may deem such a confession concerning her, she was longing for him to kiss her again, and she was conscious of her heart's throbbing more quickly every mo-

ment as he delayed doing so. After all, there was nothing really ignominious in a girl who had promised to be a man's wife, wishing that man to give her that thrilling assurance that she was more to him than another. She felt that if his cool restraint continued much longer, she should quickly come down from her pedestal of triumph and success, and be a very heartsore, mortified girl.

She was well versed in all the arts that women use to please and win. No one knew better than herself the value of a tender inflection in the voice, of a tremble in the lips, of a softened light in the eyes. No one was more alive to the power that is temporarily vested in a woman's slender hand when she lays it confidingly on a man's strong arm. No one was more awake to the truth that love, freely displayed towards themselves, makes strong men very weak sometimes. But she could not use her arts and her knowledge now as she sat by the side of the man to whom she was affianced, and longed for him to kiss her.

A horrible feeling possessed her presently, as she strove to seem absorbed in her drawing,

that he might be cold by nature, that he would go on, always giving her well-regulated affection, and never give her love. Then an even more horrible feeling smote her. Supposing some other had the power of winning him to warmth; supposing he should let himself marry her, and let himself love somebody else! and supposing she (Isabelle) should ever discover this fatal truth, and be compelled to live out her life uncaressed by the only one whose caresses she might receive in honour.

Her hand trembled, and she threw her brush down, and leant back on the wooden bench on which she was sitting. As she leant back her shoulder touched his, and she started and blushed and trembled at the contact. But he only bent forward a little, and looked at the water-coloured attempt at reproducing the home of the old love—the still-loved—the married woman whom to dream of was dishonour.

"I wonder if she will spend her life here?" he said, absently.

"Spend her life here; do you mean Cissy?" Isabelle asked, nervously.

"Yes." He hesitated a moment, and then he went on, "I can't imagine her doing it."

"Oh, she does many things that you wouldn't imagine her doing," Isabelle said, impatiently. And he acknowledged the truth that she had hit unconsciously, and sorrowed that it was so —sorrowed that Cissy should have done the one thing which he could "never have imagined her doing," namely, married another man.

"Will you give me this little sketch when you have finished it?" he asked; and Isabelle, feeling a little flushed and pleased, asked him coquettishly, why he wanted it. His answer was given at once, and was what she had hoped and expected it to be.

"I want it as a memento of this morning," he said, and in his anxiety to get it, he threw some of the tenderness he was feeling for her, who was the mistress of that house into the tones he addressed to his betrothed bride, and his betrothed bride was thoroughly satisfied that she had evoked the tenderness.

"Of course I would give you that, or anything else you asked me to give you, Edward," she said, inclining towards him again; and

this time he did give her that for which she was longing—a kiss!

"Don't you think I ought to go in and pay my respects to Mrs. Scorrier?" he said, after a pause; and Isabelle's heart gave a jealous throb as she replied,

"No, no, no; why should you? besides, Cissy is gone to Glene."

"Then shall I not have the pleasure of seeing her at all?" he said, in a voice from which he could not banish every tone of disappointment. He had been feverishly desirous of seeing Cissy this day—feverishly impatient to read in her face what she thought of him for forsaking first vows, though she herself had rendered those vows futile.

"I dare say, if Cissy had thought you cared so much about seeing her, that she would have stayed at home, and sent me to Glene; but, oddly enough, such a plan never occurred to either of us." All this Isabelle said poutingly, and Mr. Lister had a profound objection to being pouted at, therefore he made no reply, and Isabelle had another interval of chill, and chagrin, and disappointment.

After a brief pause, even at the risk of awakening the suspicions of his promised bride, Mr. Lister made another effort to gratify the greatest interest he had in life.

"Will Mrs. Scorrier be at Glene all day?" he asked.

"No; I heard Arthur promise to ride with her this afternoon. She will hardly disappoint him," Isabelle answered.

"No; she will hardly disappoint one she loves so much," he said, feeling ashamed of himself for so hungering as he did to hear that Cissy did not love her husband so devotedly after all.

"As for that," Isabelle said, feeling cross with Cissy, without well knowing why; "as for that, Cissy is not too apt to consider other people; if she amuses herself at Glene, Arthur may wait till another day for his ride."

"Do you think she isn't very deeply attached to her husband?" he said, and as he said it, the evil passion for Cecile was upon him strongly.

"Really, I don't care to discuss the depth of her attachment to her husband," Isabelle

said, rising up; "she's rather hard about most things, a sort of woman who suffices to herself, and thinks occupation a panacea for most sorrows, and would have liked nothing better than to have gone on the stage, and all that sort of thing, that I can't bear. I have no doubt she does think herself very much thrown away on Arthur, and Danebury, and——"

"I thought you loved your cousin," he interrupted.

"So I do," she said, blushing; "but," and then she paused, and stole a soft, loving look at him, and seemed embarrassed, until he asked her,

"But what, Isabelle?"

"But I love some one else better now, and I would rather talk of him and think of him, alone. Can you forgive me the folly?" she said, in her softest voice. And he responded in the only way he could respond; and her heart swelled with love and pride again, and she gave back his mute and spoken assurances as warmly, if not as sweetly, as Cissy had done of old.

But it was so strongly marked; the difference that existed between the two women was marked so very strongly. In this fawn-coloured girl, whose beauty was so massive and firm, and whose nature was so thin and fluctuating, he felt with painful force that he should never find a panacea for his life's disappointment about Cecile. The one, once having, would have the power to hold for ever. The other might bring him into bondage, but would never be the conqueror of his heart.

Yet this other one had much about her that was pleasant to the taste and heart of a man. If only she would have been content with a semi-sincere liking and adulation; if only she had lost him as lightly as she loved him; if only, in fact, she had not led his feet into slippery places, and made him seem untrue to the ruling passions of his life.

This, at least, must be conceded to him—he was not a narrow-minded, not a small-natured man. He was not a bit ashamed of himself for loving Cissy still, though she had got over her love for him so entirely. He had no sense of degradation in being constant to one who

had been inconstant to him. It never occurred to him that he was inflicting the tortures of mortification on Cissy by remaining near to her now. He never felt stabbed in the way she did at the recollection of the time they had passed together, and of the incidents which had stamped the memory of that time in burning colours on her brain. He was absorbed in a great regret that she should have passed away from him as entirely as that time,—at least, he had been absorbed in this until now that another keener, fresher regret mingled with it; and this was that he should have let himself fall into the folly of an engagement with Isabelle Vargrave.

He liked the girl—the cousin of his own old love—too well to wish to hurt her in any way. But he did not love her nearly well enough to feel other than a loathing to the prospect she had forced him to contemplate. Yet there was no way out of the difficulty. He was not qualified by nature and practice to play the part of that despicable creature the jilt. He could not propose and carry out a plan for "throwing her over," and proceeding on his

path as if nothing had happened. He acknowledged to himself that there was nothing for him now but a marriage with her, and he acknowledged it with a foreboding heart.

In consequence of the restraint she could not fling off in his presence, and a little by reason of those financial difficulties which were beginning to make themselves felt in their establishment, Cissy had not been in good spirits lately; and so, arguing from what he knew, as was natural, and utterly leaving out of consideration the countless circumstances he did not know, Mr. Lister believed her to be less happy than she was in her marriage, and less satisfied than she was with her fate. He deceived himself far more effectually than he had ever sought to deceive any one else, in spite of that taint of insincerity which Cissy fancied she had discovered in him. He attributed her depression to a re-awakened love for him, and his heart ached almost as much for her as for himself, as he projected himself into the future, and thought of all Cissy would have to endure in his marriage and in the hearing it discussed.

These thoughts kept trooping through his brain as he sat silent and self-absorbed by Isabelle's side; and she fell into a flutter as she sat spoiling her sketch through nervousness and excitement—fell into a flutter that would have been flattering to him had he loved her, but that simply seemed a tedious claim on his attention in his present phase of feeling. And the sun obscured himself behind a cloud after the manner of the sun in autumn, and the rich crimsons and purples on the trees and in the distance paled and faded, and desolation reigned.

She threw down her brush impatiently.

"There!" she said, "the whole look of the thing has altered, and I can do nothing more to it; this horrible changeable climate."

"It is getting cold; see how bleak everything is looking; shall we go in?"

"I like the open air when I can be in it," Isabelle said, with sudden perversity; "besides, it is no use our going in, there is no one at home I feel sure."

"I see you look chilled," he persisted, feeling that there was a possibility of seeing Cissy

in the house, and that he could not stay away from that possibility any longer. "Come, I must take care of you," he added, smiling, and, for the sake of carrying his point, he put his arm round her exceedingly unresisting form.

"When can you get Papa's answer—not till the day after to-morrow?" she said, in a low voice; and Mr. Lister tried to shuffle off the subject, for he had not yet written the question to Papa.

"I dare say Mr. Vargrave will be in no hurry to tell me I may have you, if he does give his consent to my having you at all," he said, as gallantly as his feelings would permit.

"I hope he will be in a hurry; my suspense will be awful until I hear it is settled," Isabelle said, plaintively. "I have written to Mamma, telling her that—no, I won't tell you what I have said."

"You have written! When does the post go out from Danebury?" he asked.

"It's gone by this time. At least I should think it is past two, is it not? Oh yes, then the post is gone. Why do you ask?"

"Because I didn't post my letter to your father this morning," he said, in some confusion. "I relied on the mail leaving Danebury later."

"You have let a post go, after all," she said, her fair face crimsoning with a feeling that strongly resembled resentment. "What will they say? What will Cissy think?"

"I would give my life to know that," he thought, but he only said, "What does it matter! the thing must be done, and will be done. Don't be indignant with me, Isabelle, I can't stand it. Let us go in."

So Isabelle smoothed her ruffled plumes, and they went in together, just as Cissy came back from Glene.

CHAPTER VI.

"ONLY A KISS."

"ARTHUR shall never borrow nor accept a penny from Mr. Hepburn. Never! never! whatever comes." This had been Cissy's resolve, the instant she heard that Mr. Hepburn was her mother's brother, and had dealt harshly by her mother. She had repeated the sentence to herself a dozen times as she had been driving home, and she was now crouching on a sofa, with her face bent down on a pillow, repeating it as Mr. Lister and Isabelle came in.

She had suffered a good deal this day. There had been much to harass her, and she could not offer a calm front to the happy pair who now came into the room. "Why won't they keep themselves and their raptures out of my sight?" she thought, bitterly, and a distorted feeling of

their not having acted uprightly towards herself flashed across her mind.

There had been much to harass her. Every post brought a bevy of bills and urgent insolent demands for money, and the Scorriers had no money wherewith to satisfy those demands. It seemed to her that there had been no improvidence in the household management, and yet now that she came to inquire into it, thousands had been spent when only hundreds would have been justifiable. The horses could have cost little more than they had done during this past year if they had fed upon golden oats. Those ponies which were the pride of her heart had required new silver-plated harness, and their beauty had demanded a new park-phaeton. But after all, a hundred and eighty pounds covered that expense, so it could not be said that it was her extravagance which had ruined her husband. To be sure, there were those oppressive bills for her *trousseau;* but as they had not been paid yet, Arthur's money had not gone for them. Her twenty-guinea saddle and her hundred-guinea piano, the diamond star which Arthur was so proud of seeing sparkle on her brow, the rings

with which he loved to adorn her lovely little hands,—all these things had cost money truly, but they ought not to have ruined a man in good practice, in such a practice as had been Arthur's when she married him.

Spasms of self-reproach assailed her! She had not been thinking much about his practice, or whether it was widening or decreasing lately. In the early days of her marriage she had determined to be very ambitious for her husband, had resolved to incite him to gain professional distinction, had vowed to be proud of his professional success. She remembered how elated she had been at Arthur's being called to that consultation which had taken place over Mr. Lister's bruised form. She remembered what glories she had prognosticated would ensue from that cure and its consequences. Above all, she remembered that when she had found Lister to be the lover of her youth, she had ceased from that earnest personal interest in her husband's pursuits and success which every wife who would be a true help-meet should feel.

And now she was punished. Her mind was quite alive and awake now, and she was pun-

ished. Things had gone wrong—must have been going wrong for a long time—and they were in a mesh of troubles, from which a little foresight would have saved them.

She wondered she had not thought of it and spoken about it before. That partner of Arthur's—he whom Arthur had helped and put forward—had been undermining, and gradually superseding her husband. There had been little intercourse between the two families all along; for Cissy had detected, and scornfully shown that she had detected, the rancorous envy and petty feeling with which Mrs. Monsell regarded her—Cissy. The little black-browed, sallow-faced woman had been unable to conceal the virulence of the hatred she felt for the bright, fascinating stranger who had come and apparently carried all things before her in the neighbourhood. Even in that little matter of going to Castlenau, Mrs. Monsell conceived that she had been worsted and injured by Cissy.

"I never can be obsequious to people whom I can't recognize as my superiors in any real way, and I can't grovel," Mrs. Monsell would observe, tossing her tight, shining, black-haired

head. "Mrs. Scorrier has a much more humble opinion of herself and her husband's position than I have, thank goodness! But there, the poor thing has never been noticed in society before, I should say; so it's a small wonder if her head is turned."

And then Mrs. Monsell would go on to tell how she had been courted, and sought, and generally made much of in Bath; and how she had escaped the whirlpool of fashion and dissipation in order to become the admirable wife and mother she now was; and other things to the same effect, to the delectation of her single-minded Danebury hearers.

On the afternoon of this day, which had let Cissy into the secret of her mother's life, and Edward Lister into the truth that he would be very hard held to his bargain, Mrs. Monsell came to make one of her state calls on the senior partner's wife. Her visits to Mrs. Scorrier were very few, and made at very long intervals, for she was gradually building up a wall between Mrs. Scorrier and the more severely respectable portion of the female inhabitants of Danebury. She had never said anything

decidedly against Cissy, but she had looked both suspicious and pitying, and both these looks are powerful weapons in the hands of ill-natured women. She had also openly avowed an intention of "being kind to Mrs. Scorrier," which avowal does more damage to the one about whom it is made than any other form of innuendo.

How had it come about? It is very hard to say decidedly, but it had come about that a certain portion of the old Baden-Baden story had got known in the neighbourhood. Whether Mr. Blayne had been harassed into confiding it to his wife, in the vain hope that she would cease all investigations into his share in the "Cissy" cause—or whether one of those miraculous voices from afar (which are heard in real life very often), had been heard on the subject—is not known. All that is known is that Mrs. Scorrier found herself looked at and listened to as women who are supposed to have specs about them are looked at and listened to.

She had been supreme in her indifference to all until now. Even when Amelia had said

to her, "Even your intimacy at Castlenau doesn't save you from evil report, Cissy," Cissy had not condescended to ask what the evil reports were, or to disclaim the "intimacy" at Castlenau, which no one knew better than Amelia, did not exist. She had been only too happy to accept the neighbourhood's estimate of herself, since it left her in peace. But now her faculties were all aroused, and the truth came home to her that she had been made a stumbling-block in her husband's path.

She was thinking of this, and of many other perplexing things, when Lister and Isabelle came in from the garden, and found her leaning on the sofa. "Luncheon is on the table still," she said, getting up, and giving him her hand, without looking at him. "I am not well this morning; take my cousin in, and excuse me, will you not?" So he found himself forced into a further *tête-a-tête* with Isabelle, even while his mind was distraught with anxiety as to what caused Cissy's grief.

By-and-by Isabelle left him to write a letter, which she might not have time to write to-morrow before post-time—an explanatory letter

to her mother, relative to the delay in Mr. Lister's prayer for her hand. And while she was writing her letter, Mr. Lister went back to the drawing-room—and Cissy.

She had got over all sentiment concerning him, but she had not got over all sentiment concerning that time of which he was the hero. He could not, therefore, have come before her at a more inauspicious moment than this.

She sat up, and made an effort to look unconscious, and free from embarrassment. But the effort was a failure, as all such efforts must be when they are made by a woman whose eyes are red, and whose face is swollen with crying. He did not like to say, "I fear I interrupt you," and retire, as would have been the more merciful course. So he paused by a small table, and played with a paper-knife, and a new volume of poems.

"Where is Isabelle, Mr. Lister?" Cissy asked, presently.

"Gone to write a letter, I believe," he said, slowly, and then he put the volume of poems down, and looked at her with a look that was fraught with apology, affection, and sympathy.

He was longing to state some of the extenuating circumstances which had let him into this engagement, and he did not know how to begin.

"I am afraid you are not very well this morning, Mrs. Scorrier."

"Yes, I am quite well."

"I thought I knew the expression of your face too well ever to give a wrong reading, and I read suffering in it now. For the sake of our old and dear friendship, have confidence in me now."

"Our old and dear friendship was of a nature that will not bear to be spoken about between us now that I am married, and you are going to be married soon," she said, boldly. "As to having confidence in you, I have it to a great degree, still I shouldn't be justified in confiding my troubles to you. My husband is the privileged being who must bear the burden of them." She tried to smile, and speak cheerfully, but her voice failed her. It is hard for a woman to point the path out to a man in such a case as this. Her heart and her judgment must be at issue, the one declaring for leniency, and the other for rigour.

"I wish to speak to you of my possible marriage." She gave him a sharp glance of interrogation as he said the word "possible;" and he corrected himself. "Of my contemplated marriage, I should say; will you give me leave to do it?"

"To do what?"

"To speak to you about it."

"Certainly, Mr. Lister; I am Isabelle's cousin. I love her as dearly as if she were my sister; I owe her parents such a deep debt of gratitude for the home and the love they gave me, that I have a heartfelt interest in all that concerns their daughter; of course you may speak to me about your marriage."

"Will you allow me to speak of my own feelings?"

"I rely on you not to say anything that I may not hear," she said, firmly.

"I will not utter a word a saint might not listen to," he said, eagerly. "I will not pain you by dwelling on my long hopeless quest, on my ever-recurring disappointment, on the protracted agony of baffled love ——."

"You are like a woman. Dwelling on the

very things you start with avowing you will not dwell on; the best example I know of that form of weakness is May's mother in 'The Cricket on the Hearth.' Do you remember what I mean?"

"I don't want to talk about May's mother," he said, stiffly.

"But I do; she's a delightful study of huffiness and selfishness; she would bring herself and her own feelings to the fore on every occasion, at any cost to other people."

"You imply that I am doing the same, Cissy. Let me speak once before I'm condemned by every consideration of honour to keep silence for ever."

"Are you not already so condemned?"

"No, I think not; I have a right to justify myself to you."

"No such justification is needed, do believe that," she said, earnestly. "There has been suffering and unhappiness in our lives, through no fault of our own; but that is all past, and the clouds have dispersed."

"From your life, maybe, not from mine," he said, bitterly.

"Don't force me to think less well of you than I love to think," she said, sadly.

"Mrs. Scorrier, even at the risk of offending you for a time I must speak; my heart is not in this marriage I am going to make."

"Then why are you going to make it at all? Poor Isabelle," she said, passionately.

"Why! why, indeed! and yet you would be the one to blame me most severely if I did not make it now."

"Yes, now—now that you have given her the right to show her feelings."

"Mrs. Scorrier, she showed her feelings before."

"I did not think I should ever hear such ungenerous words about a woman from your lips."

"You are like the rest of the world; because I think Miss Vargrave a beautiful girl, and an attractive girl, and because I have shown that I do consider her these things, I stand committed in your mind to marry her, since she wills it."

"Not because of that alone, but because you have asked her to marry you, Mr. Lister."

Cecile spoke coldly, reprovingly; and still aggrieved as she was on Isabelle's account, she could not restrain a certain thrill of pleasure when she heard from his own lips that she was not dethroned in his heart yet. She was only a woman, and it is so hard for a woman to be superseded.

"If I told you why I asked, and how I asked, her to marry me, you would think me a coxcomb, and I can't be thought ill of by you, Cissy. I had condemned myself to a solitary life. I will not tell you why; you know the reason as well as I do. I am not thankful to your cousin for making that self-condemnation null, but I will try to make her happy. Love is over for me—or at least the hope of gratifying it went out some months ago, when I woke from the stupor consequent on an accident, and heard that all was marred to me in life, because one was married."

He had drawn nearer to her as he was speaking, and now, as she sat motionless, with downcast head, he was close to her, so close to her that she could see he was trembling. She was blaming him bitterly for speaking, and

blaming herself still more bitterly for listening to him—she whom Arthur trusted so fully and entirely—she! a married woman, and he the plighted husband of her own cousin, whom she had declared to be dear as a sister. Sinless as she was in the matter, she felt a very sinner, as she roused herself at last, and rose from the sofa, saying, "I have heard you too long, Mr. Lister;" and he muttered in reply,

"Forgive me, let me kiss your hand once," and was pressing his lips to it as Mrs. Monsell, taking in the whole scene, and all its possible meanings, sailed along the room.

Cissy, flushed, agitated, unhappy, distrustful of her approaching guest, miserably conscious that she had been wanting, not in rectitude of purpose, but in rigour of demeanour, looked the very picture of guilt. There was a look of satisfied vindictiveness on Mrs. Monsell's sallow face that frightened Cissy, brave as Cissy was in the ordinary exigencies of life. A vague dread assailed her that some lie, which was part a truth, might get abroad, and damage, not only herself, but Arthur. Hitherto secure in the consciousness of the perfect integrity of

her conduct and thoughts, she had been rash in making reckless defiant assertions respecting herself and her proclivities. What if these should be brought against her now, and fitted ingeniously, by spite and malice, to circumstances. That kiss on the hand would be wafted all over the country, and she would have to expiate it in poverty, obloquy, and isolation.

Stammering and blushing, unable to control her voice or her colour, she introduced Mr. Lister to Mrs. Monsell, and had the satisfaction of seeing that lady acknowledge the introduction as warmly and courteously as a Capulet would have welcomed a Montague in the period anterior to Juliet's indiscretion. Then Cissy tried the weather, and that failed her. And then, in despair, she questioned concerning the Danebury people.

"Had Mrs. Monsell seen the Pottingers lately?"

Mrs. Monsell had; they were nice, quiet, thoroughly good people, who could be known without fear or reproach.

"Yes," Cissy said, desperately, "they are

as good, and simple, and refreshing, as the cowslips in the meadow, to me."

"I do not like to turn such truly excellent people into ridicule by comparing them to flowers which they do not in the least resemble," Mrs. Monsell said, with almost insolent coolness. Then she rose up to go away, having stayed exactly five minutes, and Cissy felt her cheeks glowing with the fury only an unjustly assailed woman can feel.

Mrs. Monsell departed, and called at the Pottingers "in passing," and—but it is needless to follow "the trail of the serpent"—suffice it to say that before nightfall nearly all Danebury knew of Mrs. Scorrier's dereliction from wifely duty, and pitied Mrs. Monsell for being placed in the painful position of being compelled to mark her sense of shock concerning it.

As for Cissy, her odious little visitor had no sooner got outside the drawing-room door than she turned to Mr. Lister, with interlaced fingers, strongly clenched together.

"It's absurd for us to attempt to ignore this to each other—most unwittingly you have done me an injury—that woman will make more of

what she saw than ever has been made of a kiss before."

"I would give my life to serve you," he said.

"That's one of the things men say kindly, without knowing how utterly futile the saying is. You can't serve me. If I had a jealous, weak-minded husband, you might vow and swear to him, but my simple statement will be enough for Arthur. I shall tell him all that has happened, Mr. Lister, and leave him to deal with the world. You cannot serve me." And then she went away from him, looking so brave and gentle, so womanly, and refined, and strong, that he loved her more dearly than ever.

CHAPTER VII.

MISJUDGED.

"But, Arthur, all my feelings are in revolt at the idea of asking him for aid."

"I don't see what else I am to do."

"Don't do that, at any rate; let us struggle, suffer, do anything, rather than put ourselves under obligations to him."

"He is your uncle, after all, Cissy."

"My uncle! Oh! dear me, the reproach of that relationship should not be brought against me. Amelia has been to see me this morning, giving me her husband's high moral and social sentiments at second-hand; preaching his excellence to me until I loathe excellence; I don't want him to make poor amends to my mother now, by being kind to me in a half-and-half way."

"After all, your mother was a little to blame, Cissy."

"I don't see that at all."

"Oh, yes she was; she was most obstinately reserved about her marriage, for instance. She cut off her own nose to spite her face, because she was savage with her brother."

"Her want of judgment does not make his conduct less detestable."

"Then, my dear child, you must take into consideration that he is a man who has a right to judge others sternly, if ever a human being had; placed in such a position, and subjected to great temptations, to have lived as he has lived is something."

"His goodness is of the cold, chilling order, Arthur; I should be able to love him, perhaps, if he had sinned and suffered; but he has never done either, and I wish to cut our bond of union utterly! utterly! I don't want to have anything to do with him any more; I hate favours at his hands; I want you to leave Danebury."

"I cannot, Cissy."

"Why not? Why stay here where I am miserable; where I am looked coldly upon by some; where we are under a most undeserved

cloud? You know as well as I do what is said, and thought, and looked, about me. Why do you stay and suffer it, loving me as you do?"

"Because I can't afford to leave the place, because I haven't the money to carry us away. Cissy, don't torture me—don't ask me to do what I can't do, don't break my heart by being miserable here where your lot is cast, my darling."

She had broken down, as he told her that he could not go, and why he could not go. Broken down, and burst into a bitter lamentation that pierced her husband's heart. It was such a cruel truth that came home to her as she listened to his words. They seemed to condemn her to an existence here amongst people who looked upon her doubtingly; and in spite of that often openly avowed Bohemianism of hers, it was so much to her to be in good repute, now that her good name and fair fame were matters of vital importance to her husband.

"Don't break my heart by being miserable here, where your lot is cast," he repeated; and

she flung her arms round his neck and asked him,—

"Is it cast here for long, Arthur? Tell me that we shall get away in time—limit my period of agony; you don't know what I suffer daily, hourly, in the way of downright slights and half-civilities. Amelia has dealt me a cruel blow to-day. They have a dinner at Glene on Tuesday, and she explained to me why they couldn't ask us. Mrs. Walter Bracey is very particular, and while certain rumours are fresh, &c."

"My poor girl!"

"Don't speak in that tone—don't look in that way at me," she sobbed, vehemently. "Heaven help me! these people call themselves Christians, and profess a creed which professes charity; yet they are doing all in their puerile powers to make me as bad as they think me."

"My own darling, those whose judgment we regard will always think well of you," he said, soothingly.

"That's nonsense, such nonsense; we regard the judgment of those who are more imme-

diately about us—we can't help doing so; it's all very well being high-minded and loftily indifferent about evil repute in the abstract; but high-mindedness and lofty indifference doesn't spare us a single pang when evil repute causes us to be snubbed, and looked down upon by our inferiors. The kindest thing I get now is good-natured contumely, and I can't go on living here."

"What are we to do?" he said, despairingly, "you won't let me ask him for money to take us away, and he has been so kind to me, poor old fellow—so sympathetic and—."

"Sympathetic!" Cissy cried, "he believes everything horrid of me, I know, and elects to be sympathetic with you on the subject."

"How you do exaggerate," Arthur said, deprecatingly. "After all, there has never been a definite accusation brought against you—if they did, they should ache for it. A lot of old women have got hold of a mare's nest; you needn't mind them."

"Don't you see that my path is infested with old women?" she said. "If we were in the world, their opinion of me wouldn't matter,

but here they make up one's life; they are round me on every side. My only alternative, if I would not be a tolerated woman, is to be an involuntary recluse. I have no vocation for such a career."

"Bear it, for my sake, a little longer," he said, imploringly. "Strengthen yourself with the consideration of this truth, that my only care in the matter is for you—the only annoyance I feel is on your account; as for what Mrs. Hepburn has said to-day, I can't realize your being annoyed at it. Mrs. Walter Bracey bored you, at her best, when you were at Castlenau; here, at Glene, where she'll feel herself a Triton among minnows, she would be unendurable to you."

"Arthur, you know as well as I do that it is the motive of the omission, not the omission itself, that grates upon me; but I won't vex you with my feeble struggles to break through the web of my difficulties any more." And as Cissy said this, she looked the look which is of all others the hardest for a man to endure—resigned.

This conversation had taken place between

them one dull November day, about a month after that lapse from judgment on Mr. Lister's part which had fallen under the notice of Mrs. Monsell. During that month much had been done and undone. The Scorriers had put down their carriage and horses, and had been put down in their turn by the great majority in and around Danebury. Isabelle Vargrave had gone home to prepare gorgeous raiment for her marriage, which, it was understood, was to take place in one of the early spring months. But Mr. Lister was still resident at the Den.

During this month Cissy Scorrier had been given many opportunities of studying the stupendous power which is vested in the hands of every woman, no matter how weak she may be, when once she is enabled to take her stand as a scorner of one of her own sex. Mediocrity was rampant in the town village in which Cissy's lot was cast—the mediocrity of narrow education and small experience, and isolation from central interests, and the enlarging influences of art and art topics. The ladies who represented the softer and more refined elements

of life in Danebury were for the most part daughters of the land, who knew all about themselves and each other, and concluded that outside that full knowledge of themselves and each other was little worth knowing. The views that were held by their acquaintances were right or wrong in proportion to the nearness of relationship that existed between themselves and those who held them. Their judgment reeled and tottered under shocks from speculative works that had been combatted and refuted, or accepted because found true long enough ago for the authors to have ceased to be the heroes of the day. They had their own little code of manners and standard of breeding, grounded upon the traditions of their equally enlightened ancestresses, and the instructions of some country-town preceptress. They kept a firm grasp of nothing in particular, which imparted an air of solidity to their set. Above all, they were strong in their power of feeling and expressing suspicion of the unknown.

Now this is a society into which a happy prosperous stranger can adventure with safety, if not with pleasure. These women, who are

founded on a rock, may form themselves into battle-array against her, but they have no opportunity of striking a blow for the virtue and respectability which she does not outrage, but just takes in the order of things. It is only when the stranger in their borders seems at a disadvantage through depression—or want of the funds which are never actually wanting in their well-regulated exchequer, or by reason of being breathed upon by that light but fatal breath of scandal which destroys as surely as the vapours under the upas-tree. It is only when the stranger is circumstanced thus that local worth does its best to crush erratic worthlessness.

Cissy was so circumstanced now, and all Danebury was true to itself, and to the habits of its order. They were one for all, and all for one, in their forays upon her. Disregarding the fact that she about whom "they had never heard anything before Mr. Scorrier brought her there as his wife," might have a private sorrow which was not disgraceful, they pronounced her guilty in their own minds at the first whisper that she might be so. Even old Mrs. Pottinger

grew tearful when she saw Cissy, and imparted it to that sufferer as a grand, though terrible, truth that "if you once get wrong in Danebury, you never get right there again." In corroboration of which assertion she proceeded to quote a variety of cases of feminine iniquity, which she seemed to take it for granted bore some degree of comparison to Cissy's.

And Arthur was away from her so much at this juncture. Striving vainly by extreme attention to individual cases to reinstate himself in that general esteem and confidence which had gone over to Mr. Monsell. Nothing fails so fast as a failing cause. Even the poor people whom he mended and drenched for nothing gave time-serving preference to the florid kindness of the junior partner.

Cissy made one or two efforts to re-establish herself. She despised herself for making them, knowing that the necessity for doing so was laid upon her undeservedly. Still she reminded herself of the social duty concerning Arthur, and bent her neck in the performance of it.

Her first effort was a painful one. She arranged a party, and asked the people who

had been holding themselves aloof from her awkwardly, to her house. The answers to her invitations were either excuses or conditional acceptances, and when the evening came Mrs. and the Miss Pottingers were the only ladies present. Then she made a still harder effort. Braced herself up to the disagreeable task of telling a man that for her honour's sake he must not show her common civility. "You must not even call on me, Mr. Lister," she said, sorrowfully, to him the first time he came to see her after Isabelle's departure.

"That will be acting, indeed, as if the past intimacy had been reprehensible—that will be the falsest move that we can make," he said, vehemently.

"Nevertheless, we must make it, if you please," she said, a little more decidedly than he liked to hear Cissy speak, in opposition to him.

This last effort of hers was rendered null and void by Arthur when he heard of it.

"I agree with Lister, it would be condemning yourself out of your own mouth to forbid his

presence in your house, Cissy; he's my friend, and he's going to marry your cousin; what reason could be given for banishing him? Besides, he relieves the monotony a little."

"Most painfully," Cissy said. "However, it's inevitable."

"What is inevitable?" her husband asked.

"That I am to be in constant communication with him—that I am to seem dependent on him for all the variety in my life."

"Yes, why not; I am sure it is better to show these people, who have misunderstood things, that I am quite satisfied. Observe a happy medium in your manner with him, and all will be well again in a few months."

"By all being well, you mean that I shall be readmitted into the society which has bent its poor mind to the task of proving me unworthy. No, Arthur; no, no! I would rather live and die in a desert, barely tolerated by wild beasts, than submit myself to the tender mercies of the inhabitants of this dismal swamp any more."

Mr. Scorrier had offered his wife admirable advice in counselling her to observe the happy

medium in her manner towards Mr. Lister. But Cissy was not one of that order of women who can observe a happy medium on compulsion. Now that an unfortunate combination of events had forced her into a greater intimacy with her old lover than was wise or well, at the same time that an equally untoward and unfortunate combination of events had forced her out of all authorized intimacy with the British matronhood about her, Cissy leant upon, and got the most that she could out of it. The old feeling of humiliation and embarrassment, which had been her dominant sensation when their reunion was new, had been deadened by habit. She suffered herself now to depart back to an older phase of feeling; and, secure in the integrity of her heart and conduct, seemed to the Danebury world to be skating on very thin ice.

Given the foregoing circumstances, and the result could easily be prognosticated. He was idle, and she was unhappy, restless, weary of, and offended by, those who were around. So they read together, as of old. Once more he guided her pencil and her taste. They rode

together; she on a horse of his, since she had none of her own; and gradually the happy light came back to her eyes, and the healthy colour to her cheeks, and she brightened back outwardly into the Cissy of old.

It was easy enough of explanation, this apparently immoral miracle. With the total cessation of all intercourse between herself and the Danebury world, all strain to please them, and to satisfy their minute and tedious claims, was over. She was the incessant object of attention to two men, who were devoted to her, and who made her feel that however lowly she might rank in the estimation of others, she was still a queen regnant to them. There was a lazy luxuriousness about the life that pleased her for a while. She was never called upon to make petty social sacrifices; never compelled to interrupt the train of beautiful or lofty thought engendered by the reading of some book, by little talks and walks, and tea-parties. Her life was ordered very solitarily, it is true; but in such refined solitariness it is possible enough to live for a time very pleasantly. People passed her now with almost

imperceptible bows, as she walked out over the crisp winter roads, escorted frequently by her husband, and invariably by Mr. Lister; and she had reached the stage of not desiring that it should be otherwise, when the Vargraves began to sound notes of preparation about the wedding.

Mr. Lister had been through the ordeal of an interview with the father and mother of the lady to whom he had made an offer—or, rather, who had honoured him by accepting an offer before it was made. He had been through the ordeal, and had deported himself in a way that was extremely satisfactory to Mr. and Mrs. Vargrave, who were gratified with the largeness of his views on such subjects as settlements. But he had not deported himself in a way that was satisfactory to Isabelle. He had been obviously impatient of the ordeal, and had passed through it with more celerity than grace, according to her judgment. Yet she would not for the world have let the others know that she did deem him wanting in that observance which she had been accustomed to consider due from the lover to the loved. He

had dined with the Vargraves one Sunday night, and had gone to church at the corner of the square, with Isabelle, in the evening; and he had done both these things with an air that was unmistakable to the girl, of not liking to do them. The amplitude of the settlements gave promise of a bright future, otherwise she could hardly have endured the present.

Perhaps Mr. Lister had never passed an evening in his life that was more opposed to his notions of how an evening in his life should be passed, than this Sunday evening in Ladbroke Square. He had been ushered into the house with a suppressed smirk from the footman, and he had been welcomed into the drawing-room with a blush from Isabelle, and both these things were eminently distasteful to him. Then he had been asked to form one of a "family party," and he found the family party included Isabelle's godfather, and that godfather's daughter, a giggling school-girl, who grew preternaturally serious whenever his eyes accidently roamed her way. His bonds were heavy upon him, and Isabelle saw that they

were so, and pitied him—and pitied herself more.

His bonds were very heavy upon him! Mr. Vargrave gave him port wine after dinner, and advice about the investment of idle cash. And when he had tided his temper through these difficulties, the school-girl friend accompanied Isabelle and himself to church, and would walk behind them, and before them, and in the gutter at their side, and in other awful places, in order to be out of their way. And when he came back from his religious exercise, the "family feeling" prevailed again, and Mrs. Vargrave treated him to a soft sleep and a snore or two in her arm-chair by the fire.

The burden of it all became intolerable to him before the evening was over, and he resolved that, let what would come, he would not take out portions of his punishment before they were legally due. In the days to come it would be his duty to go to church with Isabelle, because she would be his wife. Also in the order of things, the obligation to drink her father's port, and sit and watch the sleep and hear the snores of her mother, might be laid upon him.

But he had not taken these duties and obligations upon himself legally yet, and he could not practise them for pleasure.

So he went back to the Den to relieve the monotony of Cissy's life, leaving Isabelle with the sore conviction that, though she was going to be avowedly everything in the world to him, she was nothing at all now. A conviction that she fought against daily, and that daily gathered strength, as she went on the round of frivolous shopping that is the preliminary path along which most young women pass to matrimony.

As for him, he was not an advocate of frequent letter-writing, or of engaged people being absorbed in one another, of anything that might conduce to the furtherance of the folly to which Isabelle was inclined. So he strengthened her convictions after his return to the Den, and by-and-by Cissy noticed with sadness, a decrease in the warmth of Isabelle's letters to herself.

That Mrs. Scorrier did not suffer more under the coolness than Isabelle did in displaying it, cannot be denied. Hard things had been heard

from Glene by the Fosters relative to Cissy and Mr. Lister. For a little time Isabelle affected a blithe indifference when they told her "how sorry Amelia was to be obliged to tell them that Mrs. Scorrier was cut by everybody." But when they grew bolder, and added that Amelia was grieved to relate that "it was on account of Mr. Lister that Cissy was cut," the assumed indifference broke down, and the poor girl was heartily miserable, and entirely to be pitied, although her misery made her unjust to her cousin. She dared not confide her doubts and fears to her father and mother, for fear her father and mother should insist on inquiring and investigating into things, and she felt sure that no amount of inquiry and investigation would improve the position of affairs. So in the family circle she pooh-poohed the reports that had reached them, *viâ* Amelia and the Fosters, and debated with her mother as to the advisability of having admission tickets to see her trousseau printed. But though she did these things, her letters to Cissy grew sensibly cooler, and Cissy fathomed the reason why, and shrank from touching upon it in her answers.

"It will be well when they are married," she thought, and then an indignant feeling caused her heart to throb. When they were married, he would be made to condemn her by ceasing to be her friend to all outward appearances, until they were all too old for Isabelle to feel jealousy, or for Lister to cause it.

Until they were all too old for these things, and until that time, could it be that fate was to fasten her down here, where she was completely unappreciated, and comparatively useless? The answer to this question was given in time.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LIVING GRIEF.

"Ah! dearest, if our tears were shed,
Only for our beloved dead."

Outwardly Mrs. Scorrier's life was so very much the same, but inwardly it was so horribly altered. Nursing her grief and her memories had been a panacea to her woe for so many years, that now when her grief was proved causeless, and her memories false, she seemed to herself to be like a helmless bark upon the ocean of life.

Just at first after her return to Penzance, after the discovery she had made, old Mrs. Scorrier allowed herself to be what her servants termed, in answer to kind inquiries, "very low." She abstained from going to the shops where she was expected as confidently as the postman. She hurried home from church in order to avoid the kindly salutations which had been wont to be offered to her by her fellow-worship-

pers of ever so many years standing. She refused all the little stiffly worded but genially meant invitations to tea which were sent to her. She left off taking the local journal which had enabled her to revel in all the local gossip, and improved time, opportunity, and her mind by the perusal of books whose dulness and goodness was of the ghastly order. But after a time she freed herself from the trammels of these false heroics, and partially resumed some of the occupations of her daily life.

Some of them, but not all. Not the tenderest, the most sacred, the dearest of them. That daily prayer for the soul of the dearly loved who had died (as she had thought) with all his follies fresh upon his young head. That weekly visit to his tomb—that trembling, loving, half-pitiful, wholly-forgiving adorning of his grave with flowers—those long psalms of praise which she had sung to him—all these things were dropped, given over, utterly ceased from, as though they had been sins.

For the daily prayers would have had no object, and the weekly visit no honest goal; and the flowers would only have served to deck

a lie, and the pæans of praise would have been sung to an exploded deception. For he lived, hoary and prosperous, happy and old, whom she had mourned for with heartfelt mourning for thirty years, as pitiable, unfortunate, dead!

At last a change came; but a day shall be daguerreotyped at Penzance in order to portray this change properly.

A fat-looking, amber-coloured mist hung over Penzance in the morning, it was only at nine o'clock that the waters broke through it, and asserted themselves as clear and comparatively blue. The town woke up lazily to the fact, and the landlords of the various hotels caused bustle to reign in their habitations in order to induce a belief in the hearts of those who were sojourning with them that "fellow creatures" were going sight-seeing, and that there was a great deal to be done. Mrs. Scorrier, sitting at her quiet breakfast-table, felt thankfully that this was a good day for the tourists, and for the hotel keepers, and for a vast portion of the big human family in fact. Thinking this, she got up and stood at her window, and the winter sun stole in and rested on one cheek

and shoulder lovingly, and she thought of how its slanting beams were lying on the graves, and of how they were dancing on the waters of "Mount's Bay," and she fell to wondering, as she had wondered every day since she had seen Mr. Hepburn in the gallery at Glene, who that man was who had lost his life in those waters, and whose corpse had been rescued and buried in that grave.

Who was he, and what had he been like; and had his death made as real a gap in some other woman's life, as it had falsely seemed to make in hers? Had his name really been that which she still bore, Scorrier; or was the lettering on the tombstone as false as the rest? Her faith in all concerning him had been so utterly shaken by the revelation that had been most unwillingly made to her, that she almost believed that there was nothing under that tombstone save an empty coffin. The one whom she had imagined filling it for thirty years had suddenly stood before her in the flesh. Why should not the grave be as void of all things save deceit and fraud as all else?

This was a frequent phase of feeling with

her—a feeling that grew upon her and deepened within her and made her life more and more desolate each day. Since her return from Danebury, in the spring, she had never so much as glanced at that grave which had been the object of her tenderest care for so many years —that grave which had defrauded her out of so much lamentation and mourning. It seemed almost as if she nourished anger and resentment against it, like as though it had been a living enemy who had mocked her. On such days as these—these sunny winter days—the sore feeling always predominated. For on them she had been wont to go and place pretty little devices in vividly coloured immortelles on the grave, and so she felt now that her occupation was indeed gone—felt it angrily, bitterly, miserably.

She stood at the window for a long time, the sunbeams still gently kissing her soft cheek, and burnishing her silver hair. She blushed occasionally, a hot indignant blush, as it occurred to her that some genuine, rightful mourners for the man who slept beneath, might have seen and marvelled at her tributes, often.

If they had done so what conclusion could they have come to about her. That she was half-witted perhaps? or—she tried to pause in her thoughts even, and shuddered to find that she could not bear to be considered what she was. And then she thought of her son, and of how dearly she had loved his father, and of how that love had been abused, subjected to such indignities as made the passion seem a crime, a folly, and a degradation; and presently the sunbeams glistened and glittered upon fast falling tears.

Arthur's difficulties were very much in her mind this day, for that he was in painful difficulties she knew full well. She had reorganized and reduced her establishment in order to be able to help him a little. But as she had once said prophetically, the little money she could give him was but as a drop in the ocean of his debts, and she thought harder things than ever of Mr. Hepburn for suffering such a state of things to exist.

"I have made a promise to him to keep silent about my great wrong," she said to herself, "but I will break it without compunction

if needs be, to serve my son." She did not know that Mr. Hepburn had offered aid to Arthur, and that Arthur's wife had spurned it. She only felt jealously that a little child was living at Glene, pampered and honoured, who was destined, if he lived, to a career of affluence, of good repute, and great consideration; while her own boy, the eldest son of that child's father, was left to struggle and to suffer. She forgave Arthur all his improvidence and extravagance. They were qualities which had been fostered by fate and that false friend and falser father who was now leaving him to bear all the brunt of their ill-effects. The solitude of her own house grew unbearable to the poor old lady as she reflected on these things, so she went out and wandered about vaguely. Realizing that sad truth which Tom Hood the younger has sung so sweetly:

> "Ah! dearest, if our tears were shed,
> Only for our beloved dead,
> Life would not be so bitter-sweet
> As now."

Later in the day she went to visit some sick and sorrowful women of the class who cannot be legislated for, some members of that saddest

of all sisterhoods, which by the grossest satire is termed "Gay." And she relieved some cruel wants, and heard some cruel facts, and listened to some piteous truths, and came out from the contact with them, feeling more tender towards human error in every form, than she had been in the morning.

The light was dying out of the sky when she reached her own house, but she did not remain in it many minutes. She took something out of a box, and, with this something in her hand, she wended her way through a dusky square and a narrow dark lane, until she came to an enclosure. She passed through the gate and presently knelt down by, and laid a cross of everlastings upon, the grave where the unknown man slept, and said her prayers there, not for the repose of the dead, but for forgiveness for the living. When she rose up there was neither desolation in her life, nor revenge in her heart.

CHAPTER IX.

A HARD-HEADED WOMAN.

As nothing succeeds like success, so nothing fails faster than failure when once it has set in. Proverbially "Death rides fast," but still faster rides ruin when it has once fairly set off in pursuit of a man. Arthur Scorrier went along the downward path with a velocity that caused people's pity to be merged in surprise. He had so relied on the luck that had always stood his friend hitherto, for replenishing his purse whenever it pleased him to empty it, that he had made no provision for the unmistakably rainy day which had now overtaken him. The final blow was dealt to him by his whilom partner Mr. Monsell; that gentleman withdrew from the firm in an apparently unpremeditated manner, and then availed himself

of the liberty of the subject to commence a rival practice in and about Danebury.

The decided retrenchments which the Scorriers had made when the first note of the necessity for doing so was struck, had been on a broad grand scale. They had sold their horses, and put down their carriages, and discharged their gardener and their groom. But at this epoch of which I am treating now, the retrenchments were on anything but a grand scale. On the contrary, they were on a petty scale, that was infinitely wearing and painful to those who had to make them; Arthur was at the end of his resources, and his incomings were of the most paltry order now. Consequently common sense told them that they could not keep a boy, however small and useless that being might be, or a cook, however incompetent she was to deal with the raw material entrusted to her. And when they had obeyed common sense in that detail, it went on to assure them that hard cash was a better possession than the rarest bronzes, and the most exquisite copies from the antique.

It was a hard matter for them to make up

their minds to do this—to sell the art objects which had been the dearest companions to them both, down in this Danebury solitude. At the first hint of their intentions, Mr. Lister offered to relieve them of their superfluities by private purchase. But Arthur Scorrier did not care to feel that another man's unsubdued affection for his (Arthur's) wife, was the means of his being relieved from his difficulties. So he spoke sketchily of "getting some London fellow down to look at them." And when the "London fellow" came, he sojourned for a night at the "Castlenau Arms," and spoke of the motive of his mission, and sundry Danebury tradesmen got scent of it, and the next morning there was an execution in Arthur Scorrier's house.

In the midst of the sorrow, the agitation, and distress, that this occasioned, there came a message from Mrs. Hepburn asking Mr. Scorrier to go to her professionally without delay. He was bound to go, though all his feelings were in revolt at being compelled to do so, for Mrs. Hepburn had been very hard to endure of late. She had publicly slighted Cissy, and

passed her old friend with a cold scorn that the rest of Danebury was quick to see and to imitate; and she had been rigid and frigid in her demeanour to Arthur, never giving him the opportunity he was sighing to seize, of rebuking her for the meanness with which she was smiting an already smitten friend.

He was summoned professionally, and he did not dare to refuse the summons, though to obey it went sorely against his sense of what was due to himself and his wife. He was sitting with Cissy in the beautiful artistic room that was so soon to be denuded of all that made it beautiful and artistic when he received the message, and he rose up unwillingly, and sighed a sigh that smote her to the heart.

"I'd almost rather walk over a precipice than go through the village this morning," he said, in that low dejected tone from which the possibility of brightness seems gone.

"My dear Arthur;" she rose up and stood by him, brave, erect, and uncrushed, now the crash had come; "What a blessing that this has come at the beginning of our lives instead of at the end of them; we're young enough

and strong enough to recover ourselves, we have got our experience in good time; shall I put on my hat and walk through the village with you, for you must go at once, dear."

"That I may have the additional comfort of seeing you flouted and looked shyly at, Cissy; my poor child, I don't want that to put me down lower still."

"You were not put down by it when they first began to flout and look shy," she said.

"Other things were not at such a low ebb with us," Arthur said, vehemently, and Cissy could not help feeling that money was a very potent power—it had deadened Arthur to her sufferings. However, it was no use attempting to put things in a proper light to a man over whom there hung a heavy black cloud, so she gave up the point of walking through the village with him, but did not give up that of urging him to action at once.

"Since you are going, had you not better go up and see what Amelia wants, without any delay, Arthur."

"I wish you would give up calling her Amelia, now that she has given up all recog-

nition of your existence," he said, peevishly; "I suppose she wants to tell me that her brat has a cold, and to impress upon me how all important to the world at large it is, that the cold should be cured without an instant's loss of time. It's just like Mrs. Hepburn to do that now."

"Just like a mother to do it at any time," Cissy said, quietly; "her baby's sufferings may be unimportant to the world, but they're all the world to her, poor thing."

"I like that—the affectation of you attempting to pity Mrs. Hepburn," he said; and as he said it, he was so unlike the man who had courted her to become his wife "for better and worse," that bright sunny day on St. Michael's Mount. How brave he had been then, and how hopeful, and how determined! And now at the first blast of an adverse wind, all his bravery and hopefulness had fled, and his determination was all bent to the wrong purpose of seeing things concerning her in a wrong light.

But though she remembered this, and reflected on it bitterly, she only suffered herself

to so remember and reflect for a moment or two. Then she called to mind all the sore provocation to which he was being subjected, and the thought rekindled all the warmth in her heart.

"Dear Arthur," she said, "at least I can pity her for this, that in any trouble she can never have the comfort of loving her husband as I love mine."

He called her "Poor little thing," and caressed her, and made her feel by his manner of doing so, that he derived no tangible comfort from loving her, and therefore took leave to doubt that she derived any from loving him. But she decided to let that question pass undisputed now, it was more essential that he should go out manfully to the performance of an actual duty, than he should remain passive to hear an exposition of an æsthetic one.

Presently he put on his hat and went out on his way to Glene. It was sad, it was pitiful indeed, this compulsory going out to the performance of an ungrateful task, with the knowledge that he had of what he left behind him in his own home. The men who were executing

justice in his house, were about as delicate-minded as bailiffs usually are. They had acquired, through some misapprehension on Cissy's part of what their claims really were, the command of the larder and the freedom of the cellar. And some of the wine of the south had got into their heads, and there being no physical force at hand to restrain them, they gave themselves that license of tongue and demeanour which the god of the period, the working man, is apt to give himself under the like favourable circumstances.

It stung him to the heart that he should be thus compelled to leave her to fight this portion of her hard battle alone and unprotected. He did not know how utterly void of fear, how capable of enforcing respect from others this woman was, though she had been his wife well on to a year now. In the early days of their marriage, when he had been nervously afraid of her finding anything connected with him, less bright and agreeable than he had portrayed it, she had let him lap her in indolent luxury, she had suffered herself to seem inert, helpless, dependent on him, and unable to bear the

ruffling of the wind of antagonism and ill-fortune. But since the dawning of the day of their need, she had seemed to develop a light-hearted reliance on herself that was partly pleasant and partly painful to him. It was pleasant inasmuch as it proved that she would be able to take care of herself, should he perforce fall short of his vows and fail to take care of her. It was painful inasmuch as should such need never arise, she might still feel that she had the power to meet it; which feeling might make her less soft a woman, less subservient a spouse, than it is well the wife of prosperity should be, and in some vague and undefined way he felt assured that prosperity would be his portion again at some time or other.

But on this special morning he could not regret at all, he could only rejoice in that power of holding her own, which Cissy certainly had. On his way to Glene—a way that he perversely felt to be degraded and desolate, because he had to walk it instead of as of old, traversing it on horseback or in a well-appointed mail-phaeton or dog-cart. On this sad way to Glene he did little else than ruminate on the state of things

at home. As he had come out at the hall-door he had heard sounds of revelry and mirth proceeding from his kitchen, and the sounds had been hideous to him. But Cissy had gently urged him forward. "You may be very much wanted, Arthur," and he had left her to deal with the worst case.

There had come a great coolness between the two families lately. There is not space left in these chronicles to tell how it had taken root, grown, and thriven. Suffice it to say, that now it had attained considerable dimensions, and Arthur felt sore about crossing the threshold where once he had been so entirely at home. "Mrs. Hepburn had marked her sense of Mrs. Scorrier's conduct," that was the way lookers-on spoke of it. "Amelia has with sorrow felt compelled to show her husband and other people, that even old friendship will not make her countenance unwifely behaviour," Mrs. Foster said to the bewildered Vargraves; and "Amelia is overbearing past all forbearance on my part, Arthur," was Cissy's account of it, and this last statement was the true one.

Mr. Hepburn had broached the subject once

to Arthur, but he had broached it without skill or tact. "Your wife gave herself tragedy-queen airs to me the other day, Arthur," he said, "but I'll look over that if she likes to forget the subject of our dispute, and be on the same terms we were on before."

"My wife is incapable of making a fool of herself in the way you say," Arthur had replied, "and she has a good memory; anyway I can't undertake to say what she will forget and what she will remember." After that there had been nothing said between the two men relative to Arthur's wife, and gradually Mr. Scorrier came to accept the fact that Cissy was looked upon as a great offender.

There was a constraint about the very servants at Glene this morning, Mr. Scorrier felt as he passed hastily through the hall and up the stairs to Mrs. Hepburn's private room. She rose and half held her hand out to him, but he put on so much of his purely professional manner, that she turned the gesture into a detaining one to the servant.

"Ask nurse if Master Gerald is awake," she said; "Mr. Scorrier is come, tell her, and I

am anxious for his opinion." Then, as Arthur stood grim and silent by her, she went on,

"I am very anxious about Gerald, Mr. Scorrier; he is feverish, restless and weak; what can it be?"

It struck him that the woman's anxiety was not genuine, and he hated her for her conduct towards his own maligned wife, so he answered coldly,

"It is impossible for me to give an opinion till I have seen the child."

"Mr. Hepburn thinks it trifling, and didn't wish me to send for you," she went on, disregarding his coldness; "but I have such reliance on your judgment, I think so highly of your talent—" she paused abruptly, and it seemed to him that she was blushing at the warmth of her own words.

"You do me much honour, Mrs. Hepburn," he said, half sneeringly, "I regret that I haven't time to make my judgment and talent wait on the pleasure of your nursemaid now. Can I see your child at once?"

"Yes," she said; and then she led him to the nursery, where the small heir of Glene

was found to be in worse case than when he was born—which is equivalent to saying that he was in a very bad case indeed.

The baby ailments did not detain him long, and he was taking his leave with as much speed as was decorous, when Amelia interposed.

"I want to consult you about my own health, if you can spare me a few minutes this morning," she said, leading the way back to her own room.

"My time is at the disposal of those who demand it, Mrs. Hepburn," he said, gravely; and then Amelia sat down, and rested her brow in her hand, and cogitated for a few moments. When she looked up he was looking at her fixedly, and the blush lighted up in her face again.

"Are you going to tell me your symptoms," he asked.

"Mr. Scorrier, I am wretched."

"I am afraid my skill will be powerless in such a case," he said, and the colour mounted from her cheek to her brow as he said it.

"Perhaps when you hear why I am wretched you will not say so," she said, in a dignified

tone, that made him think he had mistaken her, and that she was going to confide some secret suffering to him; "have you time to listen to me?"

"My time is yours, Mrs. Hepburn," he said, frigidly.

"Then I will speak—hard as it is to speak to you when you are so distant to me. My wretchedness is not selfish; I know about all this trouble that has come upon you, and I would be your friend if you would only let me be."

"You do me too much honour to interest yourself so much in my affairs; I am afraid, though, that even you would be powerless to stem the tide of ill-fortune which has set in against me."

"I have felt so much for you, and for Mrs. Scorrier."

"We will keep my wife's name out of this discussion, if you please," he said, haughtily; "she has suffered enough undeservedly already. I owe it to her to spare her that which she loathes most—the offer of pity which is not pity pure and simple."

"But mine is pity pure and simple, Arthur," she said, hurriedly, and in her hurry she seemed to use his Christian name without premeditation. "You at least shall hear me, and judge me fairly; if I have seemed to stand aloof from you lately, it has only been because I thought that such seeming might serve you in more ways than one, more than actual partizanship."

"You thought so lightly of yourself as to believe that if you insulted my wife, other people were likely to think the more highly of her; do you not degrade yourself unnecessarily, Mrs. Hepburn."

"Has she so misrepresented things as to make you even think that I have offered her insult?" she said, sadly; "Oh! Arthur, it is hard to find oneself made to appear so entirely wrong; it is hard, very very, hard."

"At least if you have been so entirely right in your line of conduct, you have the consolation of self-approval," he said.

"That is not enough for me while you are displeased with me—while I feel that your friendship is withdrawn," she said; "from the

moment I knew what relation your wife was to my husband, I knew that between them a feud would be made between us ; they reviled each other so (Cissy was *so* violent) that I have not dared to betray any interest in her since—and this reserve on my part has wounded you—you love her so."

She said the last four words in a half-enquiring, half-deprecating tone. His reply made her start in her chair, it was given with so much vehemence.

"I do love her. God bless her, I do love her with all my heart, and soul, and strength ; I have no thought to give, no admiration to bestow on any other woman ; I would see myself shunned by every human being, rather than seem to passively accept a slight to my wife."

It chilled her heart, and fired her vanity to hear him speak thus, though she knew that she could never be nearer or dearer to him in honour than she was now. Still she longed to gain some power, to assume some influence over him. She would gain it over his heart (in a safe way) if she could. Over his mind

and the habits of his life, if his heart withstood her. At present she longed to dislodge and depreciate Cissy. She would trust to the future to adjust her own position with regard to him.

"Yes, it must be agony to you to live on as you are living now," she said slowly, "her staying on too, instead of getting away for a time, does look so unfortunately very much like Mrs. Scorrier having no friends; it must be very painful to you all, especially as Mr. Lister, the cause of it all, won't go from the Den."

"We shall leave scandal free to walk over the course—we shall leave Danebury before long, I have no doubt."

"What madness!" she said, and her face blanched as she mentally contemplated the possibility; "leave Danebury, when you can carry all before you if you like; it would be throwing away a fortune to leave Danebury; to be sure it would not do for you, as a married man, to re-commence housekeeping in a small way, but if Cissy went to stay with the Vargraves for a while, and you lived on in bachelor quarters—or here at Glene, why not?—

things would soon right themselves; do hear me and believe me to be what I am—an ardent friend of yours."

He did not at all like the turn her ardent friendship was taking, and yet he could not convince himself thoroughly that it was his duty to scout and repudiate it. Whatever he might think of Mrs. Hepburn, and of the nature of her disinterested advice, she was a woman who stood well in the estimation of the world. He had no actual right to condemn her, or to think she meant more than she said. Moreover it was flattering to him to have this ardent friendship professed for him just when he was so terribly down in the world.

"Do believe that I have only your interest at heart, and that if it should be settled that you come and stay with us, understand that you will be as welcome here as if you were my own brother; the separation between you and your wife would be only temporary,—and I am sure it will be a great gain to you." When she said that, Arthur went away, thinking that there was much in what she had said, and that she was "a hard-headed woman."

CHAPTER X.

CISSY HUMBLES HERSELF—AND MR. LISTER.

Mr. Scorrier went back through the village, feeling many degrees less desolate and degraded than he had felt when running the gauntlet of its inhabitants' observation on his way to Glene. If Amelia had done nothing else, and she sincerely hoped that she had done much more, she had pointed out a pathway to a possibly brighter future. He re-entered his house, hoping fervently that Cissy would be amenable to reason, and would not object to the very sensible plan Mrs. Hepburn had proposed, simply because it was Mrs. Hepburn who had proposed it. To do him justice, he was well inclined towards that lady now, for no other reason than because she had propounded a scheme which promised "well," he thought—comfort certainly.

"Nothing very much amiss with the baby, I hope, as you're back so soon, Arthur," Cissy said, cheerily, as she came to meet him. Cissy, though she spoke cheerily, looked wan, and worn, and haggard; and it is a fact, that the beauty of a woman's heart is less perceptible, even to the eyes that love her most under such circumstances, than when she is in good plumage. Arthur Scorrier felt strongly, as he took in the fact that Cissy was less pretty than usual, that he could not start afresh in Danebury as a married man without a great sacrifice of taste and of pride. Amelia was right—quite right—he could not do it. And as Amelia had kindly pointed out to him, he need not do it.

"The baby—oh! the baby is all right—at least, it will get round again; how have you got on, dear—no further annoyance, I hope?"

"I have made those men be quiet," Cissy said, "and I have written to Aunt Vargrave to tell her that we can't go to Isabelle's wedding, so I have got on very well, I think."

"Now, Cissy, I think this sheer folly—not go to Isabelle's wedding! why not?"

"Because we mustn't sail under false colours any longer, Arthur—that is where our whole mistake has been; that is why we are in "misfortunate circumstances," as my excellent laundress calls it. I can't afford a new dress, and a new mantle, and a new bonnet, and the dozen or two other things that new dresses and bonnets involve; I have already learnt what to avoid. I shall know how to eat and drink on the most economical principles by-and-by."

"Don't you know, my darling," he said, seriously, "I don't think our small economies, however well-intentioned they may be, will serve us at all; we must make a great and a painful effort, Cissy—we must part for a time."

"What do you mean?" she spoke very quietly.

"Just this: I wish you had not written to your people to say you wouldn't go to Belle's wedding, because then you could have stayed on with your aunt without any definite arrangement—it would have been a visit, in fact. As it is, I wish you to go. You will be happy and safe there, and I'll battle on alone here and

get my practice back, and soon have a suitable home for my darling again."

He looked bright and hopeful, loving, and devoted, as he said this; and she looked up at him with all her heart in her eyes, and gave him back a warm kiss of promise and encouragement.

"And do you think that I can meekly—no, not 'meekly,' but abjectly—go back to my uncle's house, and be, as you say, 'comfortable and cared for,' safe and sumptuous, while you are plodding on in a solitude that will be ten times harder than your solitude was before I came to break it; I can't do it, Arthur—I have had the smooth with you, I'll bear the rough, too; besides," she smiled as she said this, "don't you think I would rather stay here in the dignity of a useful spouse, than go back to my uncle's house as a rejected, useless wife."

"The fact is," he said, in his most sanguine tone, "The fact is, my darling, I shall not like you to rough it in the way I am going to—for our common weal I am going to put present prejudices aside, and remember only Mr.

Hepburn's past kindness to me, and his affection for me. I shall stay at Glene while I am trying to win back my practice, and with it a home and comforts for my wife."

"Oh! at Glene," she said, and then she offered no further opposition to the plan as he had unfolded it, but just went and did some trifling duty that presented itself for immediate fulfilment, and pleased Arthur greatly by the promptitude with which she had acquiesced in his scheme of separation for the sake of success.

Those daily duties were irksome now that this prospect of soon parting with him was opened before her. She wrote at once and recanted her refusal to attend Isabelle's wedding, putting her reasons for doing so in the best light before them—in the best light for her husband, that is. But, do what she would, she could not put her husband's reasons for forcing her to the performance of this task, in a good light to herself.

She was sorely aggrieved at his determination to go to Glene; and this, not because of

any small and petty feeling of jealousy of Amelia, as Amelia would have imagined her (Cissy) suffering from, on the subject, but because it seemed to her that Arthur was wanting in that chivalrous sensitiveness which a man should feel about his wife, in thus accepting what would be regarded as a great favour from the hands of those who were standing aloof from her, and wronging her, and misjudging her. And just as she finished her letter of recantation regarding his wedding, Mr. Lister was announced to her by the solitary domestic who was now left to dispense service to the Scorriers.

"Mr. Lister! oh, is it you?" She spoke so wearily, and she gave him such a flaccid hand, that he felt thrown back, thrust aside from all the friendly interest which he had been recently taking in the misfortunes of the Scorriers. It came home to him at once that though he might be accepted as a summer friend, and an agreeable means of passing the time in bright weather, by this woman, that after all her dearest interests were quite apart from him. Her highest joys, and her deepest

sorrows, were alike far removed from the region into which his soul might still soar in companionship with hers.

"It's very foolish of me to say 'is it you?' when I see that it is," she went on, kindly helping him through the maze into which his discovery had led him; "but the fact is, I can only talk mere commonplaces as opposed to common sense, to-day. I have so much to think about just now."

As she spoke she turned her face towards him appealingly, and the face thus presented to his vision was so different in its earnest, womanly sorrowfulness, to the bright beauty of that one which had won his heart years ago at Baden Baden. Yet, for all the difference that was so strongly marked, this care-worn countenance, worn with care for his rival, was the best loved of the two.

"You must, for the sake of our old and dear friendship, talk common sense to me, and think of something besides your own troubles, Mrs. Scorrier. That they are heavy, I feel more bitterly than you do yourself perhaps, for to me is added this bitter reflection—

that you will not let me help you out of them."

Her face got scarlet, and her eyes flashed, as with a graceful gesture of her small well-bred hand, she seemed to put aside the very idea of the assistance from him, at which he had hinted. Then she said quickly—

"I am quite ready to talk common sense about your approaching marriage. I have just been writing to Isabelle to tell her that after all, and in spite of all, I shall be at it."

"It is just of that I want to speak—I *must* speak—to you."

"Don't lay such a defiant stress on the word 'must,' you shall have no difficulty in doing so; can't you settle in your own mind how many priests shall be employed in riveting the links."

"I can't settle in my own mind whether the links shall be riveted at all, or not; just hear me," he continued, as she made an impatient movement. "You would not be indignant with, or refuse your counsel to, a man who hesitated, and asked for re-assurance, as to any other important step in life; why should you be

less tolerant about this step of my marriage?''

"Because to all intents and purposes you have taken it,'' she said, slowly. "You know better than I can tell you all that you have claimed, and all that has been conceded to you as my cousin's future husband; if you decline to fill that character now, you will have deceived me.''

She said it in such a simple way. It was so evidently the earnest thought of her mind that he could do nothing in life more despicable and culpable than deceive her! And yet she was not striving to assert any undue influence over his heart in letting him perceive that she felt this. It was only one of those unconscious, subtle, dangerous flatteries, which women do deal out to the men they like.

"Cissy! I would rather deceive every man and woman I know, than be even suspected of deceiving you.''

"It's very kind of you to say that. But you will have deceived me egregiously, if you begin now to advertise your doubts and fears about marrying.''

"Will you let me tell you how it all came about?" he asked, earnestly.

"No, I think I had better not," Cissy said, shaking her head. "I think I had ever so much better not, Mr. Lister; go to the fountain-head has always been my motto. I quote it to you now—if you have anything to say, say it to Isabelle, or to her father."

"I most probably shall do so, but I should like to say it to you first."

"To what good end? Depend upon it they would be idle words, and you would be ready to eat them in a few months."

"Mrs. Scorrier, I can never marry your cousin."

"But you must," she said, rising up and coming nearer to him in her earnestness. "How can you say such things, terrifying me? how can you have done what you have done, have said what you have said, have let things go so far with such a thought in your mind?" Then she paused and a feeling swept over her that in some way or other, to some person or other, she would be made accountable for his shortcomings, that she was accountable for them,

or if not "accountable" at least very much to blame. "Why do you make my path more thorny than it is already?" she cried. "Why do you? Why do you?"

"Cecile—for heaven's sake hear me and be reasonable; you are not to blame because I cannot love the woman who wants to be my wife well enough to do her the wrong of making her my wife at all; for it would be doing her a wrong, a great wrong."

"Why did you let her suppose that you would marry her and would deem it no wrong? Oh! how weak you have been, how vacillating and infirm of purpose."

"I acknowledge all that," he interrupted. "And still I am not so altogether wrong as I should be if I went on and suffered a false sense of honour to induce me to offer vows and make promises that I feel I could not keep. A man is not fairly treated when he is made seriously responsible for a lot of idle words that he would never have uttered if he had not been dared and defied into uttering them."

"Don't attempt to improve your own position by insinuating that you were so dared and defied."

"Mrs. Scorrier, even at the risk of offending your family feeling for your cousin, I will clear myself from the imputation of having been a willing agent in this most unhappy affair I do not misjudge Isabelle's motives, she did me the honour to love me, and to want to marry me, and she was not to blame in trying to turn my idle attentions into serious ones. A less pure-minded woman than herself would have shrunk from going the lengths she did in the security of innocence. I do not blame her, but I cannot love her—a black cloud will be over my very life if I am compelled to marry her."

"My uncle will not thrust his daughter upon you," Cissy said, proudly; and then in her anger that he should add this complication to the others that were bewildering her now, she added, "You did not find one of her blood difficult to shake off years ago, did you?"

"That is not a fair thrust. I was shaken off by one of her blood, and I have never recovered the shock," he muttered.

"What do you propose doing; or, rather how do you propose doing it?" she asked, sharply.

"I shall go up to town, and tell the truth to Miss Vargrave, and leave it to her sense of what is due to herself to do the rest."

"You have a talent for making girls play the part of their own executioners," she said, bitterly. "Well, for her sake, for her pride and honour's sake, I hope she will make your path very easy, Mr. Lister." Then she rose up, and after a moment added, "We can have nothing more to say to or to hear from each other now. You have brought misery and remorse upon me in this our second meeting. I trust to heaven our paths will branch so widely asunder here that they may never cross again."

"Brought misery and remorse upon you! How have I done that? I would spare you a moment's sorrow, an instant's doubt or pain, if I could, Mrs. Scorrier."

"I will tell you how you have done it," she said, excitedly. "There can be nothing gained or improved now by small concealments. The sight of you after so many long years of separation from you, woke up all that was weak, and vain, and selfish in me. Understand me at once. I had no love for you; every bit of my

heart was given to my husband; but I sighed to have some of the influence over your conduct and feelings that I once had the chance of exercising honourably. My love was my husband's; but I wanted to be *not* your idol, but sufficiently much to you to keep you from caring for any other woman. My wishes were not wifely, not womanly. I deserved to be punished for them, and I am punished." She paused to wipe her eyes, and clear her throat, and struggle to regain her composure, and fail to do so, and altogether to feel abject.

"You are punished! how?" he interrupted.

"How! Can you ask me how? I was punished, first pettily, in seeing you flirting, as I thought it, with Isabelle; that you could even look at my lovely cousin when I was by was a mortification to me, and when I thought it genuine, when I heard you were engaged, I smarted first to hear that, and then I smarted more under the consciousness that all this phase of feeling, though it might leave me harmless in heart, was deteriorating in thought. I was lowered in my own eyes by the reflection that my vain selfishness had subjected me

to a sting; and having told you all this, can't you understand why remorse is my portion now?"

"God bless you, Cissy, and spare you all remorse," he said, earnestly.

"I don't deserve to be spared it; I shall always feel keenly whatever misery ensues from this broken engagement, that I once wished it broken; you can never add to my happiness or decrease any sorrow of mine one jot or one tittle; yet I wished you to stay from making another woman's happiness. Is it not enough to crush me with remorse?"

"I can never blame you for what was so flattering to me," he said, warmly.

"I must undeceive you," she said, eagerly. "It was not you but my nature that led me astray. If a dog has belonged to me once, and I have been obliged to part with him, it would give me pain to see him fond of and faithful to another."

"At least you have this comfort, my allegiance to you has never been shaken."

"Have I spoken so for nothing that you can think I value your allegiance now?" she cried.

"Oh, Mr. Lister, I am in real trouble now, my home is broken up. My husband is being taught to feel that I am not essential to him, and I am rendered powerless by circumstances to make him feel that such teaching is false; yet for all this, no praise from you, no amount of sympathy for me, no extent of unbounded influence over you, would give me one moment's comfort or gratification. Honestly I only think of you now as an acquaintance who has been the means of bringing some of my worst qualities to light. I can never pander to your vanity again, Mr. Lister."

She sat before him as she said it, looking so sad, so solemn, and withal so entirely convinced of the truth of that which she was asserting, that he realised instantaneously that in truth he had outlived all power over her mind, her heart, or her taste. She was in great grief, and he could not assuage it. She was mortified, but he had no skill to soothe her. She was in sore doubt and distress, but he could never have her to come to him for any sort of panacea. "Gone, was gone for aye," as far as she was concerned, and so, what of his future?

"If we ever meet again," he began, as he stood up hat in hand about to depart, and still longing to linger.

"*We* never can meet again; I am altering fast from my former self, even as I sit here and talk to you, and to me henceforth you will not be the man I once loved (I will not deny that truth), but a poor creature who has given up glorious chance after glorious chance—a man who has lost all claim to my good opinion, and I shall rather pity you for that."

"If this is to be our last good-bye, don't make it so bitter."

"It has not even the piquancy of being bitter, Mr. Lister," she said, calmly; "it's ignominious, if you will, to be forced to say good-bye because we have been such fools, but the bitterness will depart with you."

"Will you not give me an idea of what your plans (yours and your husband's, I mean) are," he pleaded.

"No; there is no need; all our interest will be absorbed in ourselves; we shall have none to give you; and we will not take what we cannot give. And now to be very prosaic I have

no more time to bestow upon you; we have no cook now, I brush off all the soft down of romance you see, and I must go and look to my husband's dinner. Good-bye, Heaven bless you, and make you a better and a braver man, as it is making me a better and a braver woman."

He made no answer to her. Mutely he accepted her hand in final farewell, mutely he listened to her parting words, mutely he passed away from her presence, and from the story.

She gave no sad thoughtful moments to the consideration of the destruction of this long-encouraged false romance. She had neglected opportunity too long already she told herself, and so she set about repairing the omission as soon and as earnestly as possible now.

When Arthur came home he found everything served as well as when there had been no lack of servants, and Cissy dressed as carefully as in the first bright days of their marriage.

"What have you been doing, Arthur dear?" she said to him, as they seated themselves at the table.

"Oh! mooning about," he said, dejectedly; and then he helped Cissy to some fish, and sighed.

"What have you been doing, my poor girl?" he asked, when he had finished his soup. He felt better after it, better able to inquire into and to combat difficulties.

"I have not been mooning about," she said cheerfully; "I have had my hands and my head full since you left me in the morning, Arthur."

Again he sighed.

"I will tell you what I have done when Ann has given us our cutlets," and then when the servant left the room, and Arthur unwillingly suffered his appetite to lead him on to the demolition of a cutlet prepared by the hands of his wife, she told him of Lister's visit, and her interview with him.

"Then he won't marry Isabelle after all; 'pon my honour the whole family prospects are bright," he said.

"I am not sure that it will be a thing to grieve about if he does not marry her," Cissy said, calmly; "his not doing so will be a bad

thing for himself, but whether his doing so would be a good thing for her is an open question."

"I thought he was humbugging all along," Arthur said; "I told her so, and she wouldn't believe me; if the engagement is smashed, Isabelle won't care to have you there, will she?"

"Do you still think that it would be well for me to go, dear Arthur?"

"Beggars can't be choosers, and I am a beggar," he said, sadly.

"Then I will go, in firm reliance on your love and judgment," she said, quietly; "but we shall be better, braver, safer, and happier together than apart; think that I said so to you when you are at Glene, will you? Stay there while you are happy, while you believe that it is better for your prospects that you stay there; but call me back to share the cheapest cottage in Danebury with you the moment that belief fails you." And as Cissy said this she prayed fervently that the belief might fail him soon.

The next day, large bills posted in all the

prominent parts of Danebury announced that the "choice household furniture, works of art, and other effects of Arthur Scorrier, Esq., were for sale" on that day week.

CHAPTER XI.

HOMELESS.

Cissy had bowed her head and her heart in acquiescence with her husband's decree that they should part for a time for their common weal. She had done this in no half-offended spirit—there had been nothing huffy after the few first moments of bitter pain in the prospect —in her manner of agreeing to it. She did most sincerely and heartily hope that the plan would prove itself—a faulty one in practice, a false one in theory. She did most earnestly desire, that he should soon of his own accord show himself openly willing to recommence life with her in a humble, honest way under the only flag they could fairly fly now—the flag of poverty.

They parted the day before the sale. They

had no superfluous cash to waste now in travelling, so Cissy went up alone, while Arthur, after watching the train off, walked over miserably to Glene. If he had known his wife's intentions as she journeyed, and could have witnessed her proceedings when her journey was over, he would have been more miserable still.

Instead of going straight to her uncle's house, as her husband believed she would do, Cissy got into an omnibus when she had installed her luggage safely in the waiting-room, and after what seemed a very long and weary drive which involved one change of conveyance to her, found herself deposited at the "Bell and Horns," Brompton. There she got out and looked about her with the half-familiar, half-wondering gaze one is apt to bestow on a busy locality which was once well known, but whose memory has faded in the scorching heats of later trials.

The Boilers were still in their proper place, and a few people were going into the Oratory. It was all very much as it had looked when she last looked upon it nearly two years ago, before

she had been married to Arthur Scorrier. She had worn a flowered muslin on that occasion, and had just come from a flower fête in the conservatory that stands where Gore House once stood. She turned away with a bright smile as the contrast between the past and the present struck her. Tired, weary, travel-stained, and anxious she was now, certainly. But she was also now a loving wife—a woman with a well-ascertained purpose in the world, while then she had been nothing more than a waif and stray in a home in which she had no right, and on the outskirts of a fashionable world for which she had no liking.

"Retrospect is for people who have done their day's work," she said to herself, still smiling. Then she turned away from the contemplation of the Boilers, and began a slow progress along one of the rows which are now merged into and numbered as Brompton Road. After a time she paused in front of a high dingy house whose windows were decorated with sage-green curtains, and whose area was pervaded with an odour of baked meats. Half hesitatingly she knocked at the door, for a

difficulty was besetting her. The house and its appearance were familiar to her, as a house in which we have once lived must be to any one of us, but she had forgotten the name of its mistress.

A harassed-looking maid-servant opened the door, and in reply to her vacant stare, Cissy asked, "Is your mistress at home; can I see her; will you give her my card?"

She had pencilled her maiden name under her married one, hoping that it would strike some chord in the memory of the mistress of the house, if the mistress of the house was the same who had dispensed hospitality at so much a head to her mother and herself in days gone by. The harassed-looking maid-servant glanced rapidly over Cissy, threw a look out into the road, and gathered in the fact for the guidance of her own conduct that the lady had not even come in a cab, and then leisurely scanning Mrs. Scorrier from head to foot, asked, "What her business might be?" On being assured that it was with her mistress, and could not be discussed with herself, the serving-machine ushered the visitor into a darksome den at the

end of the passage, and retired in search of the lady of the house.

It was seven or eight years since Cissy had stood in this same room, fraught with the same danger as that which had brought her here this day—the design merely of boarding in this house until such time as circumstances enabled her to go to some more congenial place. It was seven or eight years since! and all things were unaltered save her own nature and prospects, apparently. She had been a girl, then, a girl on whom was laid the terrible onus of fighting a hard, hand-to-hand fight with a world that seemed bent upon being specially severe on her mother and herself. She was a woman, now, condemned to fight an equally hard battle, but with this thought to brighten the field on which she fought it—namely, that every successful stroke was winning a way by which she might pass back to her husband's side.

She was not left long to her own meditations in the dreary den at the end of the passage. The door opened presently, and the mistress of the boarding-house came into the

room. Then, slight as had been Cissy's acquaintance with the presiding deity of the establishment seven years ago, her heart sank a little lower now, as she saw that this woman was a stranger.

"Perhaps I am mistaken," Mrs. Scorrier said in clear, high-bred tones, that formed a marked contrast to the drawling, muddled, turgid accents of the other, "I remembered this house as a boarding-house, in which I was very comfortable," she added, throwing a sop to the feminine Cerberus, "it may be a private house now; if so, I beg your pardon."

"It might almost as well be if you want accommodation," the landlady said, drawing herself up and wagging some limp sage-green ribbons that waved like dejected flags upon her head, "I am full, now, besides having promised many parties that would be most desirable."

"Oh, dear!" Cissy said, wearily, "I must go somewhere else, then," and she was moving towards the door, when the mistress of the house made a feint of something having flashed across her memory suddenly.

"Well, I have just remembered, and it is most remarkable that it should be so, that there was a lady coming to take her place at my table to-night for the first time, that I have had to refuse at the last moment."

"Then there will be room for me," Cissy said, thankfully, "I am very glad of it. I want to get settled without delay, and I knew this house once."

"This lady as I was speaking of," the landlady said, slowly, still seeming to be engaged in a tough tussle with her memory, "was all that was desirable in the way of payment. Gold untold she offered me to let her come, but I had my reasons, and I said, no; money may be an object to me, with my family, and considering the way in which I was brought up, never to put my hand to a thing, I don't deny that it is much, but it is not everything references, I says, they is what I looks at." Here the landlady paused, and shook her head until the sage-green ribbons waggled again with sympathetic virtuous resolve.

"I can give you references," Cissy said, "tell me your terms, please, as you have room."

The landlady looked at Mrs. Scorrier, and estimated her pretty accurately. "More brains than money," the excellent woman thought, "she'd find out before she slept if I asked her more than I do the others."

"Five-and-twenty shillings a-week for a most comfortable bedroom and such a table as I keep, you will not object to," she suggested. And as Cissy said "she did not object to it," the harassed-looking servant was once more summoned to show the bedroom, and the landlady descended into the gloomy and cavernous depths of her kitchen to make some small but necessary addition to the forthcoming dinner. Mrs. Scorrier assuaged a doubt which she saw arising as to her solvency, by sending a cab to the Great Western Terminus for her trunks. By the time they arrived, a cracked clanging warned her that it was time to prepare for dinner, and presently she descended, just in time to join a procession of some dozen of her fellow creatures who were striving to infuse an air of being there by preference, into their walk and manner. It was a poor, harmless piece of deception which

deceived no one, not even themselves; severe censure would be thrown away upon it. It is pitiable, though, that human nature can descend so low in the scale of folly as to try and seem to like uncomfortable rooms and bad cooking at five-and-twenty shillings a-week in place of the ease and affluence and excellent *cuisine* which they sought to convey the impression might be theirs at any moment.

It was very hard to find herself stranded in such an unhomelike home as this for an indefinite period. How bitterly she bemoaned the folly which had blinded her to the great peacefulness and joy which had been her portion in the quiet, beautiful country home to which Arthur had taken her when she first married. That home was desolate now—but not more desolate than she herself was, she felt miserably as she sat on one end of an uncongenial sofa that evening, trying to think out a plan of action that should be at once proper and profitable.

They were not a nice set of people truly, these among whom she was thrown. That they would have been different under different circumstances was very possible, but, as it was,

they were not nice. They were not natural, each one strove to be thought something superior to his or her present situation in the eyes of the others. And their affectation was not of the gay, graceful order that gets forgiven. It was laborious, it was hard, it lacked the adventitious aids of good dress, and good light. One or two ladies exhibited a repellent reserve, that was only one degree less distasteful than the forced familiarity of one or two others. It was hard for the refined, home-sick woman to find herself among them, condemned to listen to them, and in a measure to respond to them, and to seem one of them in fact. It was hard, but she told herself in the keenness of her agony of remorse, that she had merited even harder things than this, for she had undervalued the blessings of her happy home, and her loving husband, while they were hers to enjoy and be thankful for. And now she was here in this wilderness, regarded suspiciously by some of her fellow pilgrims, and very dubious about to-morrow.

Perhaps, on the whole, Arthur's lines were cast in even less pleasant places than his

wife's. Her first resting-place was a weariful and a desolate one, but she was not hedged in by some of the horrible restrictions that were about him at this period at Glene. He had walked over to the Hepburns, as has been said, immediately after seeing the train start which bore his wife away, as he thought, to be happy and at rest in her uncle's house. He had walked over, and all the way he had been steeped in such misery and gloom as through all things he had never felt until Cissy's bright face had been borne from him. His luggage had preceded him, and he was shown to his room by a servant, whose manner said as plainly as could have been said by any words "you're a poor, unfortunate beggar, but I don't mind being civil to you," and then he had been left in this room to do the best that he could with his morning.

There was a note lying on the table, addressed to him in Mrs. Hepburn's handwriting. It told him that when he was tired of his own room, and his own society, he would find her in the drawing-room; she would give up her customary drive in order to stay in and strive

to make Glene pleasant to him on this first day of his sojourn there.

Pleasant to him! He threw the note down on the table and repeated the words "Pleasant to me," in harsh, angry accents. How could anything be pleasant to him, bereft, as he was, of home and wife, and independence. He scouted the idea of anything being pleasant to him as the vision of all he loved, and all he had lately lost rose freshly in his mind.

Nevertheless he owed her some thanks, some gratitude for her unfailing friendship for, and interest in him. She had not behaved well to Cissy—a smarting, choking, horrible sensation came over him as he thought of and acknowledged that. But she was proving herself a friend in need to him, and all women had their little foibles about one another. At any rate she was his hostess now, and so deserving of a certain meed of attention. Accordingly he went down into the drawing-room and there found Mrs. Hepburn.

She was not at all a dangerous woman. In her tenderest moments she never looked soft or seductive. She had a long jaw, and a habit

of moving herself in an angular way that never illustrated the poetry of motion. The beauty and gracefulness of his own wife was vividly before him now, as his hostess rose to greet him with extended hand, and exclaimed,

"So she really has left you; how one envies Cissy, her practical character, and power of adapting herself to the merely expedient."

"She went at my request, and very much against her own will, poor girl," he said, warmly.

"Oh! I dare say; the Vargraves thought they fulfilled all Cissy's claims on them when they gave her her wedding outfit; people are so selfish—they will none of them take into consideration that any other arrangement than this would have been painful and humiliating to you."

He began to think that there was pain and humiliation enough in this arrangement. However, he refrained from offering an opinion about it yet awhile.

"How is the young shaver," he asked instead. "Oh, poorly, very poorly," she said fretfully; "if he would only get well and

strong I should not care for anything; as it is I can hardly bear being buried alive here with Mr. Hepburn's fidgets."

"He will get well and strong by-and-by," Arthur said, hopefully.

"I don't believe it," she said, warming to the only good interest in her life, "he is such a frail little thing; I look at him day after day, and see him growing more and more shadowy." She paused for a moment or two, and then she resumed, with a sob in her voice, "do try what you can do for him—and me."

"With all my heart, and with all the knowledge I have," he said, warmly, as the thought struck him that it was the anxious mother, not the envious woman who had constrained him to come here. And then they fell to the discussion of the best ways and means of strengthening that slender thread by which Amelia held on to hopefulness—and happiness.

Late in the afternoon, when Mrs. Hepburn had started for that daily drive about the country for the purpose of leaving cards at the different houses that were admitted to an equality with Glene, Arthur and Mr. Hepburn

had a long, painful conversation, in the course of which the old man laid bare his wounds with no hopes of having them healed. "My wife regards me as a log and an incumbrance, and the only light in my life—my little child—is such a feeble, flickering one, that I feel it may go out at any moment; yet your wife, whom I would love as a daughter, knowing all this, strikes an already stricken man by refusing the olive-branch that I held out to her; it is hard on me."

"Cissy has had much to trouble her lately," Arthur said, feeling vague as to the form in which the olive-branch had been extended, "she did not know how kindly you feel towards her."

"But when she got that message from me she must have known," the old gentleman urged, earnestly; "my sister's child ought not to have hardened her heart against me to the point even of refusing to send an answer to my request that she should let by-gones be by-gones, and come here with her husband."

And when Mr. Hepburn said that, Arthur had no answer to make, for he fathomed at

once that the message had been entrusted to Amelia, and that Amelia had violated the trust. "It's useless to disgust him more with her," the young man thought, "he's disgusted enough already, and they will have trouble enough by-and-by about that poor child; besides, after all, it's best; Cissy will be happier and more at ease for a time with her own people than she would be here." Still, though he said this, he did feel, when the evening came, and he had to sit in sad and solitary state with that subdued husband, and that silent wife, that his own bright Cissy's presence would have materially improved the aspect of things, and thinking this made him less conversational and agreeable than Mrs. Hepburn had told herself Arthur Scorrier would be "when she got him alone at Glene."

That this scheme of amicable separation for their common weal was a faulty one he began to feel strongly, and to admit honestly to himself during the next few days. He had very much to combat, poor fellow. The *prestige* of his former position was all gone, and the local mind refused to take in the fact that his foibles

of extravagance, and the consequent loss of his property, did not necessarily involve the loss of all his knowledge and skill as a medical man. Moreover, they took him upon moral ground, and when they got him there, they judged him harshly and unjustly. His wife had left him, gone away from him, nobody knew where (at least they didn't know where, and for all their intents and purposes this was sufficient). Therefore, of course, she was to blame, and if she was to blame depend upon it he was even more to blame, for "as the husband is the wife," and *vice versâ*. Old Mrs. Pottinger and her daughters were the only people in the village who bravely took up arms in his cause, and they did it in the most practical and kind-hearted way. They, one and all, caught cold, and then fell to worrying themselves about the "poor Scorriers," until they developed feverish symptoms. And then, in face of Mrs. Monsell's having invited them to what she termed a *thé dansant*, they called in Mr. Scorrier, and cried aloud to all their friends and neighbours, about the comfort it was to have him still to call in. Mrs. Monsell strove to counter-

balance this stroke of fortune by getting it noised abroad that "Mrs. Scorrier had professed the greatest intimacy with the Castlenau people, and that it was in trying to live up to them that she had ruined her husband." This painful report she contrived to make resound in the ears of the Countess herself, but somehow or other the enormity of it failed to strike her ladyship in the way Mrs. Monsell desired. "If it was true," the placid peeress observed, "Mrs. Scorrier must have been a little fool—which she certainly *was not*, therefore it couldn't be true." Lady Ellington even went so far out of her usual way as to determine on making a demonstration similar to that already made by the Pottingers on behalf of the failing cause. But as this determination owed its birth principally to her desire to annoy her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Walter Bracey, who had declared in favour of the usurper, Monsell, it cannot be regarded as a tribute, pure and simple, to Arthur's worthy merits alone.

Meanwhile, the Glene baby grew worse rapidly, and Arthur Scorrier realized more strongly than he had ever imagined possible

the truth contained in those words, "There is no place like home." And Cissy went on deceiving him as to her place of abode and her occupation. And a bitter disappointment fell upon Isabelle Vargrave.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE EXPLANATION.

The morning after her arrival there, young Mrs. Scorrier left the boarding-house in the Brompton Road directly after the late scrambling breakfast which inaugurated daily life there. Cissy was anxious to get over to her uncle's house before any of Isabelle's confidential young lady friends looked in with the ease of intimacy before luncheon, in order to watch how the bride-elect and the *trousseau* were getting on.

For in Cissy's mind, in spite of that conversation which has been recorded between Mr. Lister and herself, Isabelle still occupied the position of a bride-elect. No note had been received from the Vargraves which could lead her to suppose that he had acted as he had declared himself about to act. "It was idle bombast, and

when he found it didn't please me, he would go on as if he had never spoken," she said, so reassuringly, as she walked quietly through Kensington Gardens and out into Palace Gardens on her way to Bayswater.

The sight of the way that had once been so familiar to her, brought back all her family feeling for the household in which she had a part when she had learnt that way first. She did sincerely hope that it was all going smoothly with Isabelle—though at the same time her feminine instincts were upon her so strongly that she could not help allowing herself to remember that Isabelle had stooped to conquer. However, Isabelle's gain was no loss to her, so she looked leniently upon the dereliction from dignity which had compassed it.

Her uncle had gone off to the city to his duties when she reached his house, and her aunt and Isabelle were sitting in a purposeless dejected way in a little room that they never used when they were cheerful, behind the dining-room. The remains of a late breakfast were still upon the table, and both mother and daughter were hanging sadly over their cups,

as if they hoped to find some comfort in them.

As Cissy was announced, and simultaneously with the announcement walked into the room, Mrs. Vargrave rose up with a feeble cry of satisfaction and flung her arms round her niece's neck. "Now we shall have some comfort, now we shall know what to do," she exclaimed, as Cissy warmly responded to her caresses. But Isabelle only rose up stiffly, and gave her hand with the air of one who deemed herself wronged. Instinctively Cecile felt that she had been wise in going to the boarding-house. This house, that had been her home once, could never be a home to her again.

"But what is the matter, and why do you both seem so dull?" Cissy asked presently, and then Mrs. Vargrave shook her head and began to cry, and Isabelle turned away with a spasm on her fair face, and a gesture as of pain—turned away and stood looking into the fire, and grasping her own hands, in order as it seemed, to keep herself from expressing all she felt.

"Oh! my dear," Mrs. Vargrave said, after a few moments' pause. "We have bitter cause to be and to seem dull. We have sad reason indeed for rueing Isabelle's visit to see you."

"Rueing her visit to me! Why?"

"Oh! it's no use going back to first causes, and rueing this, that, and the other," Isabelle said, wearily. "My engagement is broken, and my heart is broken, Cissy, that's all."

Cissy's heart gave a great throb as she listened. "Not really and altogether?" she said.

"Yes, really and altogether; Mamma may take a pleasure in talking about it—I don't." And with that Miss Vargrave left the room.

"Why, you see," Mrs. Vargrave commenced, falling upon the task of telling with ardour not to say voracity. "You see we had our reasons for thinking Mr. Lister very dilatory in forwarding his preparations for the marriage, and at last, on my advice, Papa wrote to him, and his answer was unsatisfactory, eminently unsatisfactory. He proposed coming up and being perfectly frank, and honest, and candid with us, and that didn't look well you know."

Cissy could only be dumb.

"I saw at once that it didn't look well, and I said so to your uncle, but I never breathed a word to Isabelle—time enough, poor child, when she must know it, I said. So we waited and waited, and the day before yesterday he came."

Again Mrs. Vargrave paused, and again Cissy filled the pause with her silence, which was as eloquent as the most emphatic speech could have been.

"He came," Mrs. Vargrave resumed, "and it was to be seen at once in his manner that he had something to say that would be hard for him to say and for us to hear. We were all sitting together when he came in, and though I saw Isabelle trembling like a leaf, I must say she behaved beautifully; she got up and held her hand out to him as politely as if she had nothing to think of but politeness."

"Poor Isabelle!" Cissy cried, heartily.

"Ah! you feel what's coming; you always were so quick," Mrs. Vargrave said, admiringly. "Well, he began speaking, and I must say he

spoke handsomely—very handsomely, indeed," Mrs. Vargrave repeated, with that sort of marked appreciation of well-conditioned words, well-ordered, which is a speciality of the deluded—"he spoke very handsomely about how he admired and esteemed Isabelle, and how she might make any man happy, and how he felt himself to be unworthy of her—which, as I told him at once, was absurd, we being quite satisfied as to his worth—and when he had said that, and seemed at a loss, your uncle spoke out like a man and a father, and said how he would be the last to hold any man to an engagement that was distasteful to him. And so we sat there—I and my poor girl—and couldn't speak a word while her happiness was being taken away from her."

"Aunt, dear aunt, what dare I say to you?" Cissy said, as Mrs. Vargrave stopped and sobbed. "Will you be angry with me if I say that Isabelle is happier so than she would be as an unloved wife?"

"Oh, yes, my dear, you may say that or anything else; but, you see, we can't help feeling that if he had only married her, he *might* have

loved her, while, as it is, we *know* she's unhappy."

"Did Mr. Lister explain his change of sentiments?" Cissy asked, nervously.

"Why, yes. That reminds me," Mrs. Vargrave said, with a burst of sudden memory, "he did say that for many years his heart had been given to another woman, and that though that other woman had put herself beyond the reach of his hopes quite, and of his thoughts almost, by marrying—that he felt it would be doing Isabelle, or any other woman, an injustice, to give her such a dead heart as his in return for her young, warm, living one. He spoke most handsomely, I must say, though he made me miserable by his determination."

"And how has Isabelle borne it—my poor darling?" Cissy asked, feelingly.

"To tell the truth," Mrs. Vargrave said, with an embarrassed air, "not at all well; she has taken a most perverted notion in her head that you are the cause of it; that he liked you better than a man ought to like another man's wife."

"It is a notion that I pity any woman for taking into her head about a man she loved and thought of marrying," Cissy said, quietly.

"And such an utterly absurd one," Mrs. Vargrave said, with an air of blind, maternal pride. "As I say to Isabelle, it would have been different if he had got in love with you before he saw her; but as it is, even if he saw you before Isabelle went to your house—which I'm sure I forget about—why, you were married, and not to be thought of. But Isabelle is obstinate, and persists in an opinion which, I must say, is complimentary neither to you nor your husband."

"I am deeply grieved at it," Cissy said, sorrowfully. "Evil is wrought by want of thought, as well as want of heart, "very often, in sober truth. Isabelle should have spared me such reflections as these—indeed she should."

"I told her I had never used to consider you a flirt."

"A flirt! No, Aunt Vargrave, whatever I may be, at least I am not that—that smallest thing. I have follies enough, of one kind and

another, to answer for, but flirtation is not one of them."

Then there was silence between them for a few moments, and Mrs. Vargrave occupied it by thinking that she had not yet asked what brought her there, unexpectedly. Accordingly she roused herself and asked that question, and Cissy answered—

"Arthur thinks I am staying with you, and you must let him think so for awhile, please, and receive letters for me."

"You have not come away from him, Cissy?" poor Mrs. Vargrave moaned.

"Come away from him?—to be sure I have," Cissy said, cheerfully; "the truth is, we have been improvident people, and just at present we are without a home of our own; but my dear Arthur is so plucky and so clever, that he will be fairly placed before the world again; and, in the meantime, I don't want to cost him anything, so I have come up——"

"To stay with us," Mrs. Vargrave interrupted.

"No, indeed, aunt," Cissy said, shaking her head, decidedly, "that is what Arthur thinks I am going to do, and what I want you to let

him think I am doing; the poor boy would be wretched if he thought I was on my own resources; he has an idea that all women are defenceless creatures, ready to fall victims to the mildest social monsters; but I am very well able to take care of myself—still, I want your help.'

"What *are* you going to do?" Poor Mrs. Vargrave was longing to press and entreat, and almost command Cissy to stay in that house, and be safe and happy, and comfortable. But she thought of her own daughter, and of that daughter's recently developed antagonism to Cissy, and she paused.

"I am going to give lessons in drawing and French," Cissy said, promptly. "You must help to find me pupils."

"Oh! what will people think?" Mrs. Vargrave cried, in her agony; "you so lately married, to be back here alone, supporting yourself."

"It's much better that I should be back here alone than back here with anybody else, since my husband can't be with me," Cissy said, philosophically. "And it's much more

honest of me to mean to support myself than to let any one else do it."

"But what will people think?"

"Think me a good instructress for a few months, I hope." Cissy said, blithely; "don't infuse doubt and dejection into my system, Aunt Vargrave; it will be a hard battle, however hopefully I fight it—if I take up arms nervously I shall surely get worsted."

"How will you begin?—I always wonder how people begin doing anything of that sort," Mrs. Vargrave said, vaguely.

"I shall begin by making you canvass your friends, and if that fails, why, I must advertise," Cissy said, coolly.

"I couldn't—so soon after your marriage," Mrs. Vargrave said, looking aghast. "Canvassing my friends to send pupils to you will be nearly as bad as telling them about poor Isabelle," and then Mrs. Vargrave fell freshly back upon that subject, and bemoaned it, and lamented its rise and fall, just as though Cissy's tangible troubles had never been mentioned.

The morning wore on, and Cissy began to

feel that if she did not make a move none would be made by her aunt. Isabelle had not come down again—stricken deer are apt to incline towards solitude, under the circumstances from which she was suffering. On the whole, this avoidance of her (Cissy) by her cousin was well-timed. Anger and distrust were both young and strong in the heart of the girl, and that being the case, her sympathy would be frigidly withheld, or, worse still, frigidly given to the wife who was beginning to feel the need of all the sympathetic support that could be given to her.

But excellent Mrs. Vargrave was one of that large class of people who never can let well alone. As soon as Cissy suggested quietly that she was going away, because her time was of value to herself, Mrs. Vargrave begged that she would not go without seeing Isabelle; and when Cissy remarked practically that if Isabelle had cared to see her she would not have gone away, Mrs. Vargrave cavilled amiably at the natural conclusion, and avowed that it was not like Cissy to "take offence," and to "make mistakes," and generally do what was

more just than merciful. "Go up to her room and speak to her as if nothing had happened, and it will be all right," Mrs. Vargrave advised, hopefully, and Cissy obeyed the well-intentioned injunction, as far as going up to Isabelle's room was concerned. But when she got there she found it very hard to carry out the letter of the law that had been laid down to her—that is to say, she stumbled over the obstructions that were in the way of her speaking "as if nothing had happened" to the embittered, blighted betrothed.

"Isabelle! you won't think I am forcing myself upon you," she began, hesitating just inside the door, and yearningly wishing that she could re-live the past six months—or, at least "revise," if she could not re-live them. Then (in that desirable case) all should "have had their own," so fairly and satisfactorily. But as it was! oh! as it was, nothing remained for her but to make the best of it—for everybody.

"I won't think you're forcing yourself upon me, as you call it, Cissy, if you will just let me be alone here," Isabelle said, in a miserable monotone. "My head aches. Why can't

you go out shopping with mamma, or calling on some of the kind friends (who'll be delighted to see you, and hear all about me), and leave me to have the ache in peace."

Cissy's brow contracted a little. When a woman is bent upon earnest hard work—or rather, shall I say, when the necessity for earnest, hard work is forced upon her—she is apt to feel resentfully towards those who, in mere idleness, point out that there is a path of roses to be taken—if only she has time (and conscience) to take it. "I can't afford to go shopping," she said, a little sternly, "any more than I can afford to waste good time in calling on our good friends of an enquiring turn of mind."

"Oh! to be sure," Isabelle said, shrugging her shoulders unsympathetically. "I forgot the conjugal claims: *Arthur* wants you, I suppose, and his mildest wish is your law; it's a pretty poem to you, no doubt; but, excuse me, for only seeing the comic side of it," and Isabelle laughed harshly.

A moment's hesitation or doubt as to the course to be pursued, and neither woman could

ever have bent before the other, and still retained her own respect. Cissy would not permit this moment's hesitation or doubt to intervene. "There is no comic side to it, or tragic side either, thank heaven," she said, seriously, advancing and putting her hands on Isabelle's shoulder, "only a serious side, dear. Arthur's mildest wish would be my law if I dared consult a wish of his now; as it is, we are parted for a time, by pounds, shillings, and pence, or rather, by the want of the same; and—don't you be hard on me, Isabelle," and Cissy, as she spoke, bent her head down on Isabelle's shoulder, and recovered her breath by means of a sob or two.

"You have not quarrelled with Arthur?" Isabelle asked, anxiously.

"Quarrelled with Arthur, what will you think next? don't I tell you that it's money, or the want of it, that has put us apart for a time. I am going to live in a boarding-house, and teach all sorts of things for a time, until my husband can have me home again."

"What a life!" Isabelle said, shuddering; 'how wrong of any man to marry without he

has money enough to keep a wife properly."

"That's a social platitude," Cissy said, in the vastness of her experience; "he had money enough when he married, but it failed him," she added, sketchily; and Isabelle nodded assent to the vaguely-put proposition, and wondered whether or not Edward Lister's money would have failed him if she had married him, according as she had intended, and then recalled herself to the present, and prepared to do battle against Cissy's assertion.

"It may be a mere platitude; but you must feel the truth of it," she said, sententiously.

"Isabelle, don't try to carry on a chain of argument; you're much nicer when you're feelingly discursive," Cissy said, laughing. "Come out, now, and witness my efforts, and laugh at my failures, if you will."

She tried to be affectionate and intimate, friendly and familiar, as of old, with Isabelle; but Isabelle rendered herself stonily inaccessible, after the manner of one who thought herself wronged.

"I have no time to go out to-day, Cissy, thank you," she said, coldly, "and no inclination (to tell the truth) to see you make a fresh start in life—my own is ended."

And then Isabelle bent down her pretty head, and wept, not bitterly, but plaintively.

"Will you speak to me about it, Belle?" Cissy whispered.

"I would much rather not; and yet why do I say that? It's painful enough, and mortifying enough, but perhaps I had better have it out with you."

"Isabelle, don't grieve for him," Cissy said, gulping down her own emotion with a big effort. "There is much about him that is lovable and charming, I know that; but he would have been hard to live with. He is masterful ——"

"I would have been his mistress," Isabelle interrupted.

"He would have lorded it over you," Cissy went on, eagerly.

"I would have been his slave," Isabelle said, slowly.

"He would have gone back, even in word

and outward seeming, to some older love that he chooses to believe the real and right one," Cissy continued.

And then Isabelle moved herself away from Cissy, as if she had been hurt, and said—

"I would have won him from that older love. I would have banished its memory. I would have had him for quite my own, if it hadn't been for you."

And as she said that, she gave up wrestling with constraint, and broke down utterly, sobbing and crying over that bright, broken dream as if she had no hope.

"Isabelle, dare I tell you?" Cissy muttered. And then, as she perceived that Isabelle had not taken in the full meaning of her words, she added, hastily, "Do you think his transient admiration for me—a married woman—his friend's wife, banished some older, better, purer dream, Isabelle?"

"Yes," Isabelle replied, "I *do*. I can't help your being offended, or virtuously indignant, but I *do*. Your lures won him away from some healthy love that he could have

forgotten for me. I can understand it all. He loved some Wordsworth's 'Lucy' kind of girl in his youth, and she died, probably, and he went on worshipping her memory, as men do when nothing more attractive comes to supersede it, until he met us, and then he gave up ghosts and longed for flesh and blood—and you contrasted strongly with the old love, and so he went into bondage to you, and—Cissy, Cissy, your vanity might have spared me, for I did love him."

"Shall I tell her?" Two or three times Cissy Scorrier asked herself this question, before she could decide as to what would be best, wisest, kindest. Then she remembered that, at least, no rebound from the truth could take her unawares. Moreover, she did so long to hoist a flag about which there could be no mistake. So presently she came out of her stronghold of reserve, and said, "It would have been better to tell you all this before, Isabelle; but I was cowardly, I suppose. You have formed a wrong notion of the old love with whom you thought I contrasted so favourably in his eyes. That old love was no

gentle Wordsworth's 'Lucy;' she was my best self. It was *I*, as I was ten years ago, untamed, with what men call beauty and fascination, and women some harsher names. He was my lover once, Isabelle; and he offered fresher, fonder vows to me than he has the power to offer now to any one. Don't lament him, dear; and remember what I suffered in the rivalry before you refuse to forgive my share in it."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN DANGER!

Young Mrs. Scorrier had with some difficulty and reluctance nerved herself to the task of being candid. She had come out of her stronghold of dignified reserve on the subject of that old, speedily dissolved dream of bliss, and joy and love which she had dreamt ten years ago. And now she was fain to confess to herself as she looked into Isabelle's gloomy, unforgiving face, that she had done this for no good end. "Will you not remember what I suffered in the rivalry before you refuse to forgive me?" she said, pleadingly, at the end of her confession, and Isabelle answered, "Will you remember that you were not in a position in which there could be any honourable rivalry between us?"

It was very hard to be told this by a girl whose sense of honour was normally less keen and clear than her own. In asking to have her "sufferings remembered," Cissy had referred solely to the sufferings of the past, to the pangs of memory. And Isabelle had perversely chosen to assume that she (Cissy) had meant that she suffered in seeing Mr. Lister's present allegiance given to another. Now though she had not meant Isabelle to think this—though in truth she had meant Isabelle to think something utterly different—her own conscience was not quite clear. She had in very truth, just at first, felt ill at ease, not in her heart, but in her vanity. She had asked herself—

> "Is it well to wish thee happy, having known me to decline,
> On a lower range of feelings, and a narrower heart than mine."

Over and over again she had told herself that though as his friend she could desire to see the lover of her youth happy with another woman, she could not desire to see him happy with that precise woman whom he had selected —or rather who had selected him. Yet now

she felt injured and misjudged because Isabelle seemed to have fathomed that feeling.

"When I said that I never for an instant imagined that you could distort my meaning and your own judgment so cruelly as to think I was jealous for myself in the present. I was jealous for my past, outlived self, that was all. I did not like the idea of the girl I had been, being superseded; about my present self I had no feeling."

"Really, I cannot understand such subtle distinctions," Isabelle said, coldly, "all *I know* is that I have not been too kindly or honourably treated; but *I think* that some adverse influence was used against me after I left your house."

"Isabelle, you are doing me a shameful injustice," Cissy said, warmly. Mrs. Scorrier forgot that Isabelle could only judge from results, and that she was in entire ignorance of that conversation which had been held between Lister and Cissy on the subject of his aversion to the marriage.

"You are misjudging me so unkindly now, when I need your tenderest thoughts," Cissy

went on, trying by gentle tones, and gentler caresses, to win one loving word or look from her cousin. She felt that it would be labour lost to tell Isabelle how she had argued and pleaded with, and rebuked the recalcitrant lover. In Miss Vargrave's present state of mind, she would surely regard the recital as a piece of pure romance, the offspring of Cissy's endless fancy, "Will you hear why I am here now," she went on.

"Yes, if you like to tell me," Isabelle said, languidly, "the truth is I don't take a very violent interest in you, or any one else just now; all the pity I have to bestow is given to myself." And then she sat down, with her arms resting on the dressing-table, and her face pressed down upon her arms, and told with many tears how public the indignity that had been offered her would be "after having sent dozens of people to see my *trousseau*, to be left in this way, because he couldn't love me; Cissy, it is hard! whatever you may say, it is cruelly hard—I could bear it better if it had been broken off for any fault of his. I wish papa had discovered him to be a something

bad; I wish it had come to an end in any way but this—because he couldn't love me." The girl repeated the words in a desolate cadence, and Cissy felt helpless.

"Will you not say good-bye to me, Isabelle," she whispered presently.

"Good-bye; oh! are you going?" the other returned, wearily. "You came for my wedding, I suppose; and now, finding the house will be less gay than you expected to find it, you are going away to some pleasanter place."

"Yes, to some pleasanter place," Cissy said, trying not to speak scornfully as she felt at the moment. "I am going to a dull boarding-house in Brompton when I have been to an agency office and a girl's school or two. I am going to lead the gay and festive life of a governess for a time, Isabelle, until my husband has a home of his own to take me to again. I have some troubles too, dear—I am not altogether unfitted by prosperity to sympathize with you." Then she went on and told the tale of their decline and final fall at Danebury, and, when she had told it, she saw that Isabelle

looked at their troubles as through a diminishing glass.

"You'll enjoy going back when you can go, and you'll enjoy the freedom and novelty of the life up here," Miss Vargrave said carelessly. "I wish I could go out as a governess or as anything, but I can't; I must just plod along at home. I envy you more than I pity you, Cissy; you will be a greater heroine than ever in Arthur's eyes after this—and, after all, you needn't do it unless you liked, for of course you could have a home here."

"It would be a happy home, with you disposed as you are towards me," Cissy said, drily."

"Oh! as for that, I don't bear malice, and I am bound to believe what you tell me, so of course I shall never think of blaming you again," Isabelle replied. "The same stumbling block will never be put in our paths again; I can never love any one as I loved him, and I shall never think of marriage. I'm condemned to be an old maid, Cissy."

"Self-condemned," Cissy began.

"No, no, condemned by Edward Lister and

—and fate," the girl interposed, sobbing bitterly now. "Condemned by every atom of womanly feeling and self-respect in me; oh! my blighted life—and I'm so young still."

"I was younger, more passionate than you, when I had to bow to the inevitable and give up this same man," Cissy said, earnestly. "In those days I would have given my soul for him —but I gave him up because I would not be the cause of his losing in the eyes of the world; but I am a very happy wife now."

"Ah! your nature is less constant than mine," Isabelle said, in a decided tone. "It's all over for me—it's no use arguing it, it's all over for me—and you helped to unsettle him. I don't blame you for it, but you did, Cissy, he was devoted to me."

"And I have not shattered his devotion," Mrs. Scorrier said, getting up. "I will not condescend to defend myself, Isabelle—he was free as air and you failed to chain him; because you failed I am not to blame. When you can think more kindly of me, I will come to you; until then we only pain each other."

Then they parted, and Cissy went away feel-

ing very much alone—very much as if she were left to herself to perish. For a drizzling rain had set in, and she by reason of her purse not being well filled felt bound to travel in omnibusses, and the straw over the floors of these unpleasant means of locomotion was wet, and the passengers in them steamed, and by the time she reached her goal, an agency office in the Strand, a fat fog had settled oppressively over the city, and the suburbs came in for the edges of it, and all was dreary and dispiriting. However, she bent all her energies to the task of finding something to do, and when a man or a woman with a will does that, he or she rarely fails. At nightfall when she retraced her steps to the boarding-house in the Brompton Road, she had entered into an engagement to teach French and music to the two daughters of a widow in Sloane Street, who was conducting a prosperous establishment for the sale of braids and buttons. Her letter to Arthur that evening was very hopeful.

Week by week her connection increased. Her time was fully occupied, and she began to contemplate the expediency of hiring a

piano, and taking a private sitting-room at the boarding-house. The harder she worked, the happier she was in those days. At length she resolved on making a bold stroke, and storming fortune, if fortune would be stormed by her. She put herself under the tutelage of one of the first pianists of the day. She won his heart by her beauty, her love of art, her perseverance, and her honest admiration of his style. And when she had done that, she mooted her desire that he should bring her out as a public performer, and he agreed to the proposition. "Not that you do anything extraordinary," he said; "in these days it is wisest to despair of success even if your playing is perfect, unless you can do something that no one else can do. If you could play with the top of your head, for instance, you would take: nothing short of that will shake the established favourites."

"But I don't want to shake the established favourites," Cissy pleaded.

"Don't you? ah! that is well, you shall come out, my child, and eat the bread of bitterness, and read the denunciations of dis-

appointment; you are ambitious, you have the artist-nature. *Ach Himmel!* so had I once; but see me now, I would not give that for their praise," and he snapped his fingers airily.

"But you would give a great deal more than that for the money which their praise brings you," Cissy said, "and it's money I want now. I can bear the adverse criticisms, and the denunciation of disappointment; only try me."

This she said on the eve of her venture, when she was feeling "very bold to take" what she felt she deserved—namely, a good place in the ranks of second-rate pianoforte players.

And this class of second-rate players is by no means so utterly degraded and altogether undeserving of honourable mention as the great mass of people who know nothing whatever of professional life may imagine. To the uninitiated and ignorant it is just as easy to be first as last, seeing that they never can be anything. The masses offer up adulation, and pour out pæans of praise upon some new performer or artist, if only that fifth-rate per-

former has the wit to demand instead of soliciting their suffrages. But these same masses are intolerant to, and have a contempt for the humble-hearted, thoroughly proficient genius who has never won the smiles of either the coy dame, success, or the wanton popularity. That "many-headed monster thing," the public, has but one guiding star, and that is, mention—open, printed mention. But Cissy did not realize this truth, and so hoped to take a place in the second ranks without the aid of the press.

She corresponded very regularly with her husband in these days, never betraying any of the excitement or fatigue under which she was alternately labouring. But writing to him in a cheerful, equable way that strengthened his belief in her being perfectly happy and contented in her uncle's house. The motive of the deception was good, but the manner of it might be productive of evil results; this possibility was always before Cissy Scorrier, causing her to order her life more soberly and discreetly, perhaps, than she would otherwise have done. But still she was sufficiently car-

ried out of her usual direction by a certain ecstacy of hope concerning what might come of it if only she was successful, that she left a point or two unguarded.

She had very little personal intercourse with her relations, in Ladbroke Square, in those days. The Vargraves were interested in her, and sorry for her, and anxious that her prospects should be bright once more. But they did not like her current occupation, and they did wish her safely back with her husband, and quite out of their orbit. They were equally afraid of her failing in her scheme, and becoming poorer than she was already, and of her succeeding and attaining a popularity that would mark her, and lay bare her life, and the need she had to lead it, before their little world. The Vargraves were very nice people, excellent people, in their way—people who always did right things and never made social mistakes. But they had no gentle blood in their veins, and so they were fearful of their dignity being derogated from, if one of their stock was known to make her talent remunerative. Accordingly Cissy received but a sparse meed of sympathy,

when she did go there, from the old people, attached as they were to her. While as for Isabelle, she still regarded herself as unfairly worsted by Cissy, as a married woman, and so was a degree more chilling than an open enemy could have been. On the whole it can easily be understood that the atmosphere lacked all geniality, and so Cissy kept out of it as much as she could, and strove to absorb herself in attention to her master's instructions, and to her art generally.

This master was a German, a composer of some repute, and an admirable performer on the instrument he loved better than he loved anything else in the world—the piano. He had married a promising pupil of his own, six years before Mrs. Scorrier knew him, but she (his wife) fell into ill-health, and the delicacy and strength of her touch deserted her, and altogether she loomed before him as a being to whom he was linked for life, and a failure. The eminent German *Maestro* was an intensely selfish man. He lapsed rapidly through all the stages of indifference, and, by the time Mrs. Scorrier was introduced to him, he had

freed himself from the conjugal incubus, and was living in luxurious bachelor solitude in apartments, in Bond Street.

At the piano he was grand, inspired ; but apart from that—his really better half—he was a poor, effete creature, of infinitely small design, and even smaller execution. He would be a gallant, and he would have loves to relate, in spite of the difficulty he experienced in getting even the least scrupulous and fastidious women to listen to his gallantries. Such as he was, however, he insisted on wearing Mrs. Scorrier's chains most publicly, when she was not by to check the display. On wearing her chains, and prognosticating a future for her, and making her his theme, his object, his shrine, on which to lay his waste and withered flowers of love and flattery.

It was decided that she was to make her first appearance before an enlightened audience in the evening. "People are always harder to please by daylight—before they have dined," he said, so Cissy had the encouragement of much light, and a gaily dressed house, when she came forward and bowed her acknowledg-

ments, for the first burst of applause that greeted her because she was very fair to see. The press was well represented—her master had felt its pulse and pronounced it healthy and good. Her master was wild with excitement too, and was so encouraging that Cissy began to wish heartily that she could do without him. Not even professional feeling, she thought, justified the length and warmth of the grasp he had just given her hand. She was thinking this as he led her forward to the piano when her first trial came. And then she looked up and tried to face those who were to be her hearers and judges, and as she did so her eyes met, and were fascinated by the eyes of her husband.

Things had not been going smoothly at Glene. One morning, when Arthur had been there about six weeks, there had passed a tremor through the whole house early one morning, and he had been called to Mrs. Hepburn's room, where he found her mourning in the bitterness of a grief that could not be comforted. Her little boy was dying, and there was no help for the child, and no comfort for

the mother. Before the sun set that day there was no heir to Glene, and then a sore task was set before Mr. Scorrier. The husband was seized with paralysis, and the wife, sullen in the midst of her woe, would not go near him. The one bond that had held them together—the little child's life—was broken. "Nothing could renew it," she said. She loathed her lot as his wife, at any price she prayed for her freedom.

There were two or three sad, degrading scenes in that stately house during the ensuing days. A woman, rich in youth and health, and strength, shuddering away from the task that was appointed her of nursing and comforting the stricken old man, who pleaded so earnestly, so abjectly, for her love! her pity! her presence, even. Shuddering away from her husband and her duty, and turning more and more appealingly to the man who could not even give her friendship now without feeling that he was being false to the bereft old man who trusted him. Even her servants revolted at the callousness which kept her away from the sick room, and the craving

which caused her to haunt every spot where it was likely she would find Arthur. And at last the sick man seemed to have a vision of what was about in the air. And he made a resolve, which it bent his pride and nearly broke his heart to make, and then the piteousness of all the scenes that had been enacted at Glene culminated in the following one.

One day he insisted on his wife's presence, in what he believed to be the chamber of death, and when she went, unwillingly, awkwardly, to his bed-side, she found his lawyer was standing there already, with Arthur Scorrier. Her heart leapt lightly at the sight. She thought she saw in it signs of his agreeing to a separation—and a separation, on any terms, she told herself would be better than the disappointed life she had led at Glene.

But it was not to hear her articles of freedom read that she was summoned. It was simply to listen to a statement which he had dictated to his lawyer that morning, and which that lawyer now read aloud. It was very brief, but it was very crushing. From it she learnt that, let death strike all out of her path whom

she now deemed in her way, and still her hopes would be no nearer fulfilment. From it she learnt that Arthur was her husband's son, and when she had learnt that lesson something moved her to go out from the room, vowing never to look upon his face again. The one firm, fervent prayer of her life had been that Arthur might, in honour some day, be more to her than another. Now her prayer was granted in a way that broke her heart. An hour after her dying husband had made that statement to her, she was in the train on her way to her father's house. Then a great pity for his erring, faulty, false, deserted father filled the son's heart, and he wrote a gentle letter to his mother, telling her that the end was very near now, and that, without sin or shame, she might come and forgive.

CHAPTER THE LAST.

IN WHICH LOVE IS VICTORIOUS.

"The world is full of folly and sin,
And love must cling where it can, I say;
For beauty is easy enough to win,
But one isn't loved every day."

In the gray quiet of an unbroken monotony, old Mrs. Scorrier had lived on all these months at Penzance. The great woe of her life, now, was that there was nothing left to her to mourn for honestly. While it had been left to her to bewail "her beloved dead," she had been, comparatively speaking, happy. There had been a certain romance in her dull life, void of all romance as it seemed to those who only saw the outside of it. But now that romance was reft from her, even her dead was taken from her, and her living was in a strait in which she could be no aid to him.

She heard of the changes that were taking place at Danebury, truly, but she heard of them in a vague uncertain way that made her heart ache for her inability to help them at all through their inability to trust her fully. They had even told her of Cissy's relationship to Mr. Hepburn, and of how Cissy's mother had, after all, been sealed with the seal of honourable matronhood. But she could not take the pleasure she once could have taken in the hearing. She felt herself condemned through her participation in the deception which had been practised on herself, to stand aloof entirely outside all these exciting family interests.

The active sorrow of her life just at present was that Cissy should be parted from her husband, even though it was for their common weal, as Arthur asserted that it was. "They took each other for better and for worse," she would say to herself, and then she would go on to feel that if she had ever been allowed to offer those vows herself, how sacredly, how tenderly, how bravely she would have kept them.

In the wealth of her great power of self-abnegation, she went heavily in genuine mourning of heart when the tidings were told her that the little heir of Glene was dead. She blushed and thought herself presuming in her perfect humility of heart, when she put on deeper black for the baby; but still she put it on, saying to herself that though "the son of the bondwoman might not be heir with the son of the free," that the same blood flowed in the veins of both, and that the little child had been her own Arthur's brother. Moreover her spirit sorrowed in unison with the sorrow of the bereaved father. And she told herself that if he had sinned, so also he had suffered, and she pitied him with all the pity of her wrung, desolated heart. But in spite of this sombre, depressing sadness of hers, she never, from the day on which she had taken it up again, as has been seen, omitted the duty which had once been her pleasure, of decking the grave she had learnt to love so well, with flowers. The poor inhabitant below might have been chargeable with all the crimes in the calendar for aught she knew or cared. All she did

know or care about was this—that she had learnt to watch and pray and to forgive, over the turf that covered. So whatever else he had been, he had been to her unconscious monitor and friend.

If he, Mr. Hepburn, her "great unknown" of so many years' standing, if he had only never married, she might now, in these days, go to him as a loving friend, a woman out of whose mind and life and heart all thoughts of passion had been pressed. She might go to him and offer him such sympathy as old age finds sweet from old age, now that he was ill, dying perhaps! for Arthur had written to tell her of his old friend's paralytic stroke. But he had a wife, a wife whose place was by his side, who would resent any such intrusion contemptuously if she knew nothing, with virtuous indignation if the miserable old story were made known to her. The new tenour of the miserable monotony of her way was upset by these reflections, which she could never bring to the touch-stone of action, to prove them true or wanting.

The only balm she could apply to her

wounded spirit was this, to write long, tender, crossed effusions to Arthur, bidding him be all that was kind and good, fond and true, to the possibly dying man. And these letters being crossed poor Arthur never had time to read them when they arrived, so their pathos was poured away as it were, and they did not bear the fruit they were intended to bear. Perhaps had Arthur perused them in their entirety a light would have dawned in upon him which their writer had never designed to shed. As it was he read the uncrossed bits in the letters and put the reading of the crossed bits by, in the manly manner, and was never illuminated in the least by reason of them.

And while these letters were being poured in upon him, his father, as Mr. Hepburn was in reality, his dear old friend as he was in seeming, grew weaker and weaker, and at last he pleaded for a kind womanly hand—and there was none held out to him. His wife was gone! She needed recruiting both in health and spirits, she wrote to Arthur to say, and as she could do no actual good at Glene, it seemed to her that, she might as well stay away.

At this stage Arthur bethought himself of his wife. Mr. Hepburn's prejudices were very few, and just now he hailed, with a touching gratitude, the prospect of this gentler presence that was held out to him. He turned to the thought of her possible coming as to a place of rest. He yearned for her presence partly because she was a gentle-handed, gentle-minded woman, and partly because she was of his own race; blood is ever so much thicker and stronger than water in its binding power when it has flowed on from generation to generation for centuries. And so as the wish and the yearning for her deepened, Arthur resolved to go up to town and bring his wife back with him to Glene.

He longed to see her himself, and he did rejoice in this fair, honourable, manly opportunity of going to her. It had hurt him a little that she should be so resigned to staying away from him, though he himself had counselled her to go. And the hurt feeling quarrelled with the satisfied feeling that she was safe. He hoped ardently all the way up to town that she would not be out walking when he reached her uncle's

house, that she would not be planning some little evening party with Isabelle, that she would not seem to be enjoying herself too much, in fact, while she was necessarily apart from him.

The little demonstrations which had been made in his professional favour had been rich in results. He had been selected in the teeth of Mr. Monsell to attend two bad cases which that gentleman was treating with all the human kindness and medical skill that was in him. It began to be looked upon as quite in the order of things that Mr. Scorrier should resume his former fair proportions in their midst.

That he should tend their sick and afflicted, and gently content their fretful and fanciful. The more enterprising and sanguine spirits among them began mentally to cast about for a fitting house in which he could dwell when his term as a visitor at Glene expired, and his wife returned to him. People began to speak of her in a sort of forgiving patronizing way that would have been gall and bitterness to her had she known. Those who were indigenous to the soil, and who had never gone out and faced danger or conquered difficulties out of the

ordinary way, said that "really now if she only came back and would be careful and quiet, all would be looked over, and she would be received." There was a ghastly satire in those saying it who did say it, for they belonged to the big class whom Cissy deemed it the heaviest portion of her cross in her early married days to know. They were mostly retired relicts of respectable members of the industrial classes, comfortably off squire-farmers whose whole talk was of guns and dogs, and whose wives' talk was of things even less definitely satisfactory. But for all their shortcomings socially, for all their trying and hardly-to-be-borne sins against tact and refinement, they were in a position to sit in the seat of the morally scornful about Cissy, and they sat in it.

It was at this juncture, when the supporters of his cause were rallying round him again, that Arthur Scorrier went up to town for his wife. All the way up to town he had been contrasting her unfailing gentleness, and candour, and warmth, with the chilly dreariness, which it must be confessed was Mrs. Hepburn's predominant characteristic. He pictured to himself as he

travelled, two or three pretty little meeting scenes. He knew Cissy's eager, kindly disposition so well that he kept the hansom at Mr. Vargrave's door while he went in. "She will want to start at once," he said to himself, "and I won't have the bother of sending for another cab." Then he went in to find Mrs. Vargrave and Isabelle alone with blank dismay.

"Why didn't you write to say you were coming?" was Mrs. Vargrave's reply to his eager question of "Where's my wife?"

"I had no time—how are you, Isabelle?—let me see Cissy at once, I want her to go back to Glene with me, this minute if she can."

The mother and daughter looked at each other and trembled. This was a complication that they had never foreseen—this that her husband should arrive in their midst and seem to think them responsible for his missing wife. "The fact is, Cissy is not in just now, Arthur," the younger lady said, recovering her head first, "but I think I know where she is, and I'll send for her," and then Isabelle went to despatch a messenger to the boarding-house, and to feel very good and magnanimous for not

betraying the deceiving wife to the deceived husband.

Little by little, ray by ray, hair's-breadth by hair's-breadth, a light came into Arthur's mind as he sat with them waiting impatiently. He knew from the constraint, which they could not put away from their manner, that they were ill at ease. And as soon as he felt sure of this, he set himself the task of discovering the reason. Isabelle was more altered even than a jilted girl—than a betrayed betrothed has any right to be altered. And Mrs. Vargrave was frightened out of the semblance even of the few wits that were hers.

By-and-by Miss Vargrave was mysteriously summoned from the room, and when she came back, Arthur felt sure that her messenger had returned, and that Cissy was not forthcoming. The reply to her verbal message sent to the boarding-house was indeed as unsatisfactory as anything well could be under the circumstances. "Mrs. Scorrier was gone up to practise at her master's, but the mistress of the boarding-house didn't know his address."

"When do you think it likely Cissy will be

in?" Arthur asked, discontentedly, "she will be back to dinner, I suppose?"

"Well, I am not sure," Mrs. Vargrave said, dubiously; "you see, in London one never knows." Then she remembered that this was not exactly the sort of apology or excuse to offer for a lady, and she grew more confused than she had been before, and felt ill-used both by Cissy and Arthur.

It was useless to keep it waiting, so he went out and dismissed the cab, and while he was doing so, Mrs. Vargrave and Isabelle held a whispered colloquy, and discussed the desirability of "telling him the truth." "If we do, Cissy may blame us; she is so uncomfortable about everything now," Miss Vargrave said, pettishly. "I will write a note to her at the boarding-house, telling her to come here the instant she comes home—she must come home to dress for her concert to-night, you know."

They took comfort in this conclusion, and so assured Arthur when he came back, after sending off his cab, that she must be back in the afternoon sometime. And Arthur was fain to accept their assurance.

Still it was very possible some time might intervene before she returned, they said, so as they evidently did not want him, he went up and strolled into the gardens, and then along to the Marble Arch. Unluckily, as he came out from the gateway, an omnibus, whose course was Piccadilly, pulled up opposite, and he got on the top of it and was driven along, undecided as to where he should get off and what he should do.

"There's always something going on here," he thought, getting down at the end of Swan and Edgar's shop. Then he sauntered up Piccadilly a little way, and looked in at the Egyptian Hall, and found one room occupied by a gentleman who made mince-meat of a lady in pink, in a clothes-basket, one moment, and introduced her whole and hearty to the affrighted audience the next. While the other room was resounding with clamorous applause an appreciative public were bestowing upon a wan-looking young man who took it upon his own weak head and falling shoulders to portray the manners and habits of "Good Society—illustrated by sketches and songs."

This place was dull, duller than in his own old student-days, when he had come there and derived inexpressible amusement from the performance of poor Albert Smith. Arthur Scorrier turned away disconsolately, and, crossing over to the other pavement, soon found himself carelessly perusing the bill of the concert that was coming off that night in St. James's Hall.

As fate would have it, Cissy's name was printed in this bill, though she had sedulously adhered to her determination of not letting it creep into the papers. As he read that Mrs. Scorrier was to make her *debût* to-night, he laughed, with a certain feeling of its being odd that such a name should be there. He never once contemplated the possibility of its being his own wife who was advertised.

The programme was a very seductive one. As he read it over again, and saw the names of two or three great singers, whom it was rarely any one's fortune to hear out of opera, he felt as if it would be throwing away a chance if he did not stay and hear them this night. The concert would be over by ten—there would not be time for Cissy to feel very

anxious about him, even if she did go back to her uncle's house sooner than those vague relations of hers seemed to expect her. So thinking, he went in and took a ticket, and then went into the coffee-room, and dined.

So it came to pass that, when Cissy was led towards the piano to make her opening sensation by her proud and admiring master, her husband's eyes met hers. For a moment the room seemed to rise at her, and the boards fell away under her feet, and the foot-lights flared out, "shame" and "bravas" that were meant for greeting, sounded like cries of confusion, and thick darkness spread itself before her vision—and—she found herself still standing erect, able to return her husband's gaze, able even to walk on to the piano as if nothing had occurred. It required a stout effort to so control and manage herself, but she made it, and Arthur admired her pluck, even in the midst of his anger.

She played as if she were inspired, several enthusiastic people remarked to one another. And so she was, inspired by a horrible fear of blundering, and being pronounced foolish, as

well as faulty. She played far better than she had ever played before—with more feeling, more fervour, more brilliancy—she seemed to herself to be under penalty of sudden death if she were not correct, beyond all possibility of blame. When she had finished, the plaudits set in, and her master proudly accepted the tributes to his power of imparting instruction, and assured her of her great success—and she only looked at Arthur, and longed to implore him, even then before them all, to forgive her the indiscretion, because she had meant so well.

She got herself away back to the performers' private room, and hastily scribbled a line, entreating him to come over; and presently he came, and the two stood about awkwardly, and half hoped, half feared, there was going to be a scene. She had been quietly accepted as a widow before this by the people who had heard of her, not on her own statement nor at her own suggestion even, but just because there was no visible Mr. Scorrier to the fore. But now she was at once judged and condemned as a frisky matron, whose

husband had returned, from India probably, and caught in the commission of an escapade.

The few words they exchanged sounded so coldly to the ears and hearts of both. "I did everything for the best, Arthur," she muttered, not daring to offer to put her hand in his, for fear he should refuse it.

"No doubt of it—we won't discuss the wisdom of what you have done here. I have come to take you back to Glene—Mr. Hepburn is very ill."

"Has Amelia sent you for me?" she asked, quickly.

"Mrs. Hepburn has deserted her husband now that he is dying," he said, and then Cissy hurried on her cloak and hood, and was preparing to depart, when her master came back from the concert-room.

"You are promised to me to supper," he said eagerly, taking both Cissy's hands in his in a burst of that free foreign fashion which Arthur had once promised not to mind, and which he now found to be unbearable.

"I cannot keep that promise. My husband

has come to take me to a sick relation," she said, smiling.

"Sick relations are inadmissible in the realms of art. Lady Brugher has been imploring me to get you to her concert to-morrow night; she wants you to give her two daughters lessons. The field is won, my pupil."

Arthur Scorrier could hardly restrain himself from knocking down the animated and admiring Teuton as he said those words "my pupil." "Come, Cissy," he said, impatiently, "Mr. Hepburn's time on earth is not long enough for us to waste any of it in listening to idle compliments," and then he scowled at Cissy's art-adorer in a way that that gentleman imitated with great effect at a miscellaneous supper-party at his own house two hours afterwards.

When Mr. and Mrs. Scorrier got into a cab Arthur gave the Vargraves' address in Ladbroke Square, and then Cissy had to explain that even in this he was mistaken.

"Not there, Arthur; I am living at a boarding-house in Brompton."

"You are living in an atmosphere of decep-

tion," he cried, intemperately, as he flung himself into the cab, while she gave the number of the house in the Brompton Road, and for a few minutes Cissy was silent, seeking to disentangle right from wrong. She was trying, too, not to feel too sorry for being snatched away into oblivion before she had realized the full flavour of that public success which it was in her to win and command. When she did speak, it was to say,

"I'll defer the explanation of my motives until I have time to tell you all of them, Arthur. I must pack up now, for I suppose you will start to-night?"

"Don't you go near the Vargraves?" he asked.

"No! I will not now." And then she told him briefly how Isabelle had attributed her sorrow to her (Cissy), and had turned against her in it.

They went back by a night train, and when Mr. Hepburn opened his eyes the next morning he found them standing by his side. Even the few hours of Arthur's absence had wrought a change in the dying man. He was palpably

weaker in the flesh; but his first words proved him to be stronger in the spirit.

"Do you think there can be forgiveness for a man who has lived a lie for more than thirty years, Arthur?" he asked; and before Arthur could generalize in a consolatory way, Mr. Hepburn added,

"Send for your mother to come at once; she will tell you that I am such a man. I will run the risk of losing all the love and respect you now feel for me, rather than die with the truth untold."

But though he said this, and said it many times with the weary love of repetition which marks physical decay, they neither of them anticipated much of a revelation when old Mrs. Scorrier should come. "He's magnifying trifles, poor old fellow," Arthur said to Cissy; "He looks upon it as a lie and a sin now that he should have called that aversion to seeing my mother feeling for my father; I am almost sorry he should insist on her being sent for."

"It's best to please him, though it can do no good," Cissy said, in the blindness of ignorance.

So at last she was summoned. At last she had the reward her patience and her lasting love and tenderness deserved.

It was a contrast, indeed, to her last visit to Glene, when she had been introduced surreptitiously, as if she had been contraband goods. She was met and welcomed now, and courteously entreated, and conveyed at once by Arthur and Cissy to the dying man's side. Then as he stretched his hands out to her and called her "Mabel," and implored her "to forgive him," and Arthur and his wife looked with wondering inquiry as "to what it all meant," she, kneeling by his bed, told her story and his own to their children.

Six weeks after this, advertisements in all the county papers told that Glene was to be let. It was quite a romance, everybody said. The old gentleman had died childless after all, but he had found a sister's child in his favourite, Arthur Scorrier's wife, and he had left all his landed property to her, only charging the estate with a splendid jointure to his own wife. There was another secondary romance, too, connected with the late owner of Glene. Mrs. Scorrier,

the widow of an old friend of his, had died two days after him, and was buried in the Hepburn family vault. The first intruder in that sacred spot. The only remnant of mortality there who was neither a Hepburn by name or birth. But it was the will of the young mistress of Glene that it should be so, and the neighbourhood was careful now how they canvassed her actions.

It was the will of the young mistress of Glene, also, that Arthur and herself should keep the secret of the sorrow of his mother's life, and the sin and subterfuge of his father's, still. "Leave the dead alone, love," she said, applying the refrain of the ballad of Lenora to the circumstances of their case, "let them rest together, undisturbed by gossip."

Additionally, and perhaps this was not the least wise of her resolutions, it was her will that Glene should be let for three years, during which three years Arthur and herself went to many of her old haunts, with no fear now, on her part, of meeting any of the old haunters of them. They have assumed the name of Hepburn, according to Mr. Hepburn's desire,

but they keep the fact of their children being so closely of his blood to themselves.

For, according to their own judgment, they have disentangled right from wrong, and they have done it in this wise.

"You were wrong to live beyond your means, and to try and seem to be richer than you were, even though your object was to preserve my peace of mind, Arthur; and I was wrong to feed false sentiment, and flatter a man by seeming to be unable to bear his defalcation when it didn't hurt me in reality. Your duplicity brought us to poverty, and mine has brought us into ill-odour with my relations. But I was *not* wrong to keep the fact of my honourable work from you, when you had tried to force me to live in dishonourable idleness. And you will be so right, dear, to keep your parents' names unspotted before the world, since no one will be injured by your reticence."

In answer to a long self-accusing, thoroughly explanatory letter which Cissy wrote to her cousin Isabelle, on the eve of her (Cissy's) departure for some of those old haunts for

which her spirit yearned, she received a full acquittal from that young lady.

"I felt all along that Mr. Lister was not worthy of me," Isabelle wrote (it is astonishing how ready a woman is to declare in word that a man "is not worthy of her," if he has shown in act that he does not think her worthy of him),—"and so I struggled to do what was right for papa and mamma." Then she went on to tell how her struggles had carried her very much into society, and how, while love and marriage had been furthest from her thoughts, a most exemplary, accomplished, clever, rich, and altogether worthy brewer, "with a splendid place in Kent," had proved to her that she had "made a mistake about Mr. Lister"; and, to cut the story short, had given her an opportunity of rectifying that mistake. In extenuation of her own change of sentiment, she went on to quote Cissy against herself. "You know you prophesied this," she said; "your own experience taught you that first love is a delusion. We shall be able to sympathize with each other, dear Cissy, though you were only

the object of his boyhood's dream, while I was the choice of his sober manhood."

"Tell her that a great impediment to your perfect sympathy lies in the fact that you rejected him, while he rejected her," Arthur said, when he heard that passage in Isabelle's letter.

"What is the use of telling a woman what she knows already?" Cissy said, good-temperedly, "rather let us go and choose her a charming wedding present, and send it to her, with a letter hailing her as very victorious."

THE END.

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