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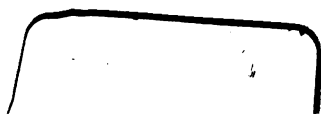
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# NEVER FORGOTTEN.

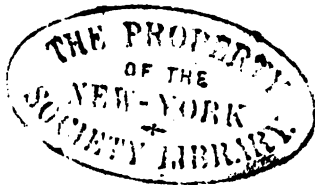
BY

PERCY FITZGERALD, M.A.,

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF STERN," "BELLA DONNA," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

1865. x

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LONDON:

PRINTED BY C. WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.

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# *NEVER FORGOTTEN.*



## CHAPTER THE FIRST.

### MAJOR CARTER.

A RIM of low, old-fashioned little houses, like dolls' houses, runs round a sort of hexagonal tea-board-shaped patch of green, called Hans-place, just at the back of Sloane-street. A slumbering monotony reigns there. The hall doors are tight, and have a huddled hunchback air, and the houses themselves are squeezed close, like a crowd at a show where room is precious, and where stewards have been making people move up. Major Carter and his son had three rooms in one of these little houses—the parlour story and a cold little warren at the top, where the roof began to slope inconveniently just over the deal dressing-

table. The major had seen troubles of late; things had not gone smoothly with him. "Poor Mrs. Carter's long illness was a heavy 'draw' upon us," he used to say. "She required many comforts, and all the care we could give her. Our doctor said change of air—keep moving about: and she had change of air, poor soul! So I am not as rich as I was, and I am not ashamed to own it."

Heavy business matters, too, were entailed on the major by the death of his wife—what he called "winding up her affairs" (in the Irrefragable Company), kept him in Hans-place. He had to watch those "fellows," who were treating him in a shabby, unhandsome fashion. Otherwise, town was not nearly so suited to the major's life as the little realm of a watering-place. *There* he had everything under his hand: he could cover them all with his hat. "We were more thrown together there," he said. "Some of the pleasantest days of my life were spent at Eastport."

But there was yet another attraction. A stout, round, red, and wealthy lady, called Mrs. Wrigley, had a house in Cadogan-place, where, having twenty years before decently interred Joseph Wrigley, Esquire, Chairman of the United Bank, she lived in quiet and substantial splendour, and swung about London in a quaint old chariot. As the late chairman had been what is called "universally respected," so his relict was as sincerely

admired. She was the object of many gallantries from young gentlemen and men of a more "suitable" age; and she treated these worshippers with mature coquetries, which did not seem in the least out of place, and were conventionally accepted by the circle in which she moved, as quite becoming. Youths struggled who should "take her down"—*i.e.* to supper; and at parties younger pairs were often detained at the foot of the stairs, while she slowly passed down the straits—a sort of human reproduction of Turner's "Fighting Téméraire towed to her last Berth" by a light military tug.

Yet with these worldly elements she mixed a little religious seasoning. Until she came to know Major Carter, she affected the society of the Reverend Punsher Hill, a dissenting clergyman of a strong spiritual flavour, whose chapel was in the Chelsea district. There he poured out streams of holy hartshorn—the very Preston salts of divinity—and "drew" large crowds. With him was combined, in her society, a clergyman of the more established ritual, who sprinkled ess-bouquet and rose-water from his pulpit, and made everything pleasant.

For these gentlemen a sort of "main" of tea was kept flowing in Cadogan-place. The odium theologicum did not, as it ought to have done, hinder their assimilating or balancing Mrs. Wrigley symmetrically on each side, as though they were



“supporters” for her arms. She had contributed handsomely to Mr. Punsher Hill’s new conventicle, built for him by admirers of his Preston salts, which was called “Mount Tabor;” and she had given moneys to Mr. Hoblush for what he called his “visiting women.” A “delightful young man,” said many; too long expended on the rural districts, now happily given up to the vast fields of missionary labour, which lie in the uncleared country of drawing-rooms, and among the pretty soft tulle-clad natives, all more or less benighted.

These two influences reigned until she came to know Major Carter. That worldling gradually began to undermine her faith, or at least her warm devotion. She was too good natured to feel any change, or show any change; but the worldling had more force of character than the two spiritualists. They felt themselves slipping as on a parquet floor, and soon the success of Major Carter was so marked as to attract public whispers, and public attention and public murmurs, and public anger.

She was delighted with Major Carter’s quiet air of the world, with his calm “weight” of manner, and readiness of speech. The others seemed untrained children near him. When his cold eye fell upon them, the two clergymen did not like the sensation.

One little transaction firmly established him as suggesting the association of intellectual power, and

the command of men's minds. The two clergy men were sitting with her one afternoon, when the "main" of tea had been laid on. Mr. Punsher Hill's figure was round, coarse, and Jersey-pear shaped. It was like a Seal in clerical attire. His face was red and brawn-like, and his throat but awkwardly confined in heavy folds of linen. But Mr. Hoblush's spiritual dress, and the figure which that dress enclosed, was all elegance. It was shapely, uncreased, unfolded, and unwrinkled. His coat or mantle seemed to flow downwards, and with such a low full grace, that there seemed a hint—by a sort of little artifice—as of an apron. His voice was soft and tender. He could not sing, but he "played a little" on the violincello.

Major Carter came in as they were busy on the "Mount Tabor" Chapel. The Reverend Alfred Hoblush was tolerant of all denominations. But Mrs. Wrigley was not so interested in these matters as she used to be. She talked to them of Lord Puttenham's coming music.

"I have done what I could," said the Reverend Alfred, sweetly, "but I have not sufficient interest. I would give the world to be there myself."

As for Mr. Hill, it was understood, without more allusion, that *his* walks were not the Puttenham walks. No reference was made to him.

Suddenly entered the worldling Carter, who began to chatter airily and delightfully on mun-

dane topics—bringing in a little legend about Lady Mantower and Mrs. Weynam Lake—serving them delicately to Mrs. Wrigley as though they had been morsels of warm toast spread with marrow. The clergy present looked at him ruefully. “All the world,” continued the worldling, “is crowding to this Puttenham party—and his wife, of course. More the wife, perhaps, than the world;” and then he worked this text pleasurably and fluently for a half-hour, and then rose to go. He put his head in again. “By the way, Mrs. Wrigley,” he said, “I have a message, which I had forgotten. Strictly in private, though.” He whispered, “I have ventured on a great liberty, but that is all right—the Puttenham affair, you know. It will come to-night. But a profound secret, I stipulate that.”

The surpassing delicacy with which Major Carter had transacted this little affair—his anticipation of her wishes—from that hour established his supremacy.

## CHAPTER THE SECOND.

### LORD PUTNENHAM'S "LITTLE MUSIC."

THE Town knew Lord Puttenham very well. He was sometimes darkly mentioned as the "noble Amateur." He was a musical lord, had played "a little," *i.e.* execrably, on a hoary Cremona violin, and gave a little musical senate laws. There was no Lady Puttenham, and so, through his fine house in Dover-street, strange and protracted agonies were heard, as of a maiden wailing, which was the musical lord busy with his "scales;" and in the musical house sheets of music lay tossed here and there, high and dry on chairs and cabinets, floating wildly on the carpet, as though there had been a wreck, and a great musical Indiaman had gone to pieces in the drawing-room. The musical lord going about on duty, sat as a musical

magistrate, and had cases brought before him, on which he passed judgment. New harmonious gipsies, eager to get a hearing, and who had brought either a voice, or a fiddle, or a whistle, from the Continent, were led away to him, and adjudicated on. His head lay so much on one side with this listening, that the attitude became habitual and normal; and on occasions of extraordinary attention he listened with his head erect. Yet he was a florid, round, selfish, and practically useless nobleman. With all his audiences, his whispering in corners, his taking of buttons and button-holes, his shrugs, his showering of criticism and musical terms as from a dredger, he never did any real good for any new or wandering artist. And when one had, with infinite struggling, rowed into public favour, the musical lord came paddling at the stern with a little oar no bigger than a fan, and really enjoyed the credit of having contributed largely to the success.

In the large mansion in Dover-street, the musical Lord Puttenham gave entertainments, which were known mysteriously as "rich musical treats." These were a sort of dry Trappist matinées and evening "réunions," where the board was spread with music, and music only; and the tables groaned with quaver entrées, and light crochet hors d'œuvres, and a sparkling presto, served as champagne. Lord Puttenham always bewailed the

decay of classical music, and did his best to restore it; and if a sort of "service," that lasted hours, the close to which was marked by the flutter of the turning of the twentieth page; and if faces of agony, and jaws hanging wearily, and mournful rustling on chairs, and acute pains about the spine, and welcome drowsiness (with some), and strange cerebral confusion (with others), and something like incipient idiocy (with one or two); if this was restoring classical music, Lord Puttenham did so effectually on every one of his "second Thursdays."

Strange to say, people came eagerly, nay, struggled to come. People of fashion, and people of quality, and people with daughters—like Lady Laura Fermor. Wise and wary woman! She saw that the soil was soft enough for rifle-pits. She saw that, from the hopeless and dispiriting character of the place, the warriors and chiefs would be driven in perforce upon what entertainment *she* could offer; and that in the arid desert character of the country, *her* daughters would stand out with an artificial attraction, from the force of contrast. Noble—zealous—almost chivalrous commander! What she suffered in the way of austerities—for cane chairs, affording rude and imperfect support, were brought in, to economise space—will never be known. If holding out her poor arm day and night, and keeping her fingers closed till the nails

grew through the palms—according to the Brahmin practice—could have helped forward her mission, she would have done it cheerfully. She did not know Lord Puttenham, but she soon “reached” him; and though the girls could move their ivory keys in the same rude way that they had learned the “dumb-bell” practice and the “pole” exercise at Madame Cartier’s, and the graceful handling of the mallet—still they had qualified sufficiently, and could be rapturous in musical praise without falling into blunders.

On a certain second Thursday all the world was there. For weeks before, the Puttenham head, well to one side, had whispered, and hinted, and shrugged, of a new artist that he was bringing out; “A young Hungarian fellow; heard him last summer, in a com-mon cabaret at Prague, absolutely a Com-mon cabaret. I never heard ‘Tone’ before. A very unassuming young fellow. And I have got him to come to England. He will coin. He will put them all out—Sainton and the whole gang. It was the merest chance I just turned in there. Otherwise he would have been fiddling away to Boors and Beer for the rest of his life. I *think* I know what Tone is; and I say distinctly, Tone has never been heard until now!”

As Lord Puttenham spoke thus at his own drawing-room, a faint echo from behind said, softly:

"Tone never been heard till now!" And the registered owner of the echo was Vacchi, a musical aide-de-camp on his staff. Vacchi was professional, and a sort of Italian Englishman, who was the real chain that bound the musical lord to the actual professional world. He had what he called musical "circles" of his own, where there was genuine music provided, and genuine music paid for; and Lord Puttenham he found useful as a fine ground where he could pick up fashionable subscribers. A melodious duke or two, an harmonious earl, had been seen moving their heads with accurate beat, in time to the lively rhythm of an "Allegro Vivace," the Promised Land coming into sight after months of wandering in sterile "Adagios."

Lord Puttenham had far more ladies than men coming to have the torture applied. Men did not suffer the "Little Ease" so cheerfully. They were restless. Once, indeed, three ill-conditioned "cavalry fellows," who had got shut hopelessly in the heart of the cane chairs, and not being trained to habits of restraint, rose at the end of a "maestoso," and rudely and loudly and conspicuously forced their way out through the company, causing great confusion. One was heard at the door using what Lord Puttenham called "a ribald expression," and which sounded in the key of "utter rot!" "From that moment," said Lord Putnen-



ham, "I have made it a rule never to ask any of those soldier people."

"Won't you have an Analysis, Lady Laura?" said Lord Puttenham, handing her one. "We have a 'rich treat' to-night. Only one daughter, I declare! Now, now!"

"We knew," said Lady Laura, "how precious space was to-night. We left poor Alicia Mary, whose *passion* is music. We shall get no seat, my dear" (this sharply aside to Blanche), "if you don't move on."

The place looked like the Tuileries Gardens, there were so many cane chairs. It was crowded. Major Carter had, somehow, managed to "get" to the party, by clambering with infinite pains and heat and difficulty up into a tree. Still he was there among the leaves and branches like the rest of the company. The fashionable paper had his name, also that of Young Brett, and of Captain and Mrs. Fermor. Miss Manuel had merely said to the noble host: "You must give me a few blank cards for those I like," and a whole sheaf had arrived.

Mrs. Fermor had welcomed this promised treat with delight. She enjoyed music, and even the homily-like classical music. "Oh" she said, "how kind of her, how charming, how we shall enjoy it."

Fermor was still icy, and had plans of his own

for that night. "I think you had better not go. It is really too great a tax upon a stranger. We could scarcely go upon such an invitation. If you like to go yourself with Miss Manuel——"

"O no, no. And you think so? But," she added, a little quickly, and her cheeks beginning to glow, "I suppose the same argument will apply to us both?"

"Not at all," said he, colouring too. "You don't quite follow me."

This looked like the beginning of the cold skirmishings which lead to incompatibility. Mrs. Fermor went to her room, ready to cry like a child, or like a girl, as she was. But they both went, after all. Grim Mr. Carlay came stalking down from his rooms on the stairs; he somehow heard weeping, and appeared before Fermor in his study. The metal in his face seemed to have assumed a greater tightness and density. There was an air and manner about him that was irresistible. His remonstrances—for they were only remonstrances—seemed to be edicts. They went together; but Fermor went chafing, as though he had been a free man chained to a convict, whom he must take with him.

When they got there, the concert had begun. They had arrived at the "Grand Posthumous Quatuor in E minor," which was being interpreted by these four artists:

Ragwitz Béla,  
Krowski,  
Smart (alto),  
and M. Piletti (cello).

Ragwitz Béla was the young violinist whom the host had discovered in the "pothouse."

They had travelled many posts, at a sort of steady amble, along a high road "moderato," until they reached the last bar, when it was thought they would draw rein and bait. But Lady Laura, who had secured end chairs for her party, a judicious coigne of 'vantage, and who already was suffering mental and physical pain, and had been glancing wearily from side to side, now sadly convinced that a harem-like seclusion was indeed to prevail, saw, with a sudden sinking of the heart, the pages "turned back," and the four artists begin their journey again. It was a "repeat." When the stage was happily accomplished, there was a little pause, and Lord Puttenham led off applause, with interjections of "What tone! I never heard tone before!" Then came an entreating "Hu-s-sh!" for the "quatuor" had recovered its instruments, and was proceeding into the "adagio."

This might be described to be a musical interment—they proceeded at such a slow and mournful walk—Ragwitz Béla leading and drawing out wailing strokes with contortionate agonies—some-

times laying his fiddle like a dish under his own throat, as though he were anxious to decollate himself on the spot; sometimes quivering and straining as though he wished to drive his instrument into his neck and lay it finally against the short joints of the spine; sometimes struggling with it, sometimes beckoning with it; sometimes making spasms with his knee and foot, as though he wished to rise and fly through the air with it. The others went to the work gloomily, and with awful concentration; and Piletti, who had charge of the violincello, seemed to have a conveniently-shaped coffin between his knees.

The mortuary music was at last over. Lady Laura, already worn and haggard, but still "coming up smiling," was feeling the cane pressure acutely. Poor soul! she was old, and tall of figure, and required little comforts at home and abroad, not the rafter-like support imparted by cane chairs. Yet she smiled on, and took care that smiling should be kept up in the ranks; and when Providence at last brought the "first part" to a conclusion, she had a smile for Lord Puttenham drifting by her, and an ejaculation of ecstasy, "How lovely! Did you ever hear anything like it?"

A light and airy repast (as though the host was belonging to a severe Order) was laid on the stairs; and yet the company poured out and flung them-

selves on it with an avidity that seemed to hint that they had been shipwrecked and newly taken off a rock.

Mrs. Fermor sat penned up on a centre chair, her eyes fixed on Ragwitz Béla, whom she thought divine. Miss Manuel was in another part, while Fermor made part of a small crowd herded together at the door.

Rude persons were pressing on him; and early in the night, when he was whispering a pleasant sarcasm to young Bridges, Lord Puttenham had tapped him bluntly on the shoulder, and said, rather roughly, "You must go outside if you want to talk." He was looking over at Miss Manuel—looking sourly—for sitting beside her was that "low, ill-bred, insolent" Mr. Romaine, who had been so forward at the brougham door.

At this happy release—the end of the first part—Mr. Romaine left Miss Manuel, and came over to Mrs. Fermor. A cane chair creaked as he dropped into it. Fermor was about offering to take down Miss Manuel, when Lord Puttenham, just behind him, touched him on the arm: "Beg pardon, let me pass, please. Miss Manuel, come!" And Miss Manuel went away gaily on Lord Puttenham's arm.

As she passed Mrs. Fermor she stooped down and whispered, "Be kind to poor Romaine to-

night. He is afraid of you. He is to be pitied, poor fellow. Guess who are here—the Massingers, who were to have been in Rome. You will, I am sure." And, pressing her arm affectionately, she passed on.

"You are still angry," said Mr. Romaine; "I can see it. Yet I am the one who ought to suffer, after that awful onslaught on me the other day."

Mrs. Fermor bit her red lip, but smiled in spite of herself. "You began," she said.

"I know," he said; "I always begin. Every man and every woman tells me so. And yet I cannot help it. I am worried and tried. No one understands me, or, of course, tries to understand me. Why should they, indeed?"

Mrs. Fermor looked at him with bright and sympathising eyes.

"You judge us all very harshly," she said; "we are not all so bad as you think."

"Why not?" he said. "I begin to hate the world. I used to believe in it. I found my account in it, for I never accepted the rubbish about a 'hollow world,' and its faithlessness, and *that* cant. But now I feel shaken. I have seen something to-night that has shaken me. If that faith has left me, I have nothing to trust to."

Mrs. Fermor was filled with a sort of missionary enthusiasm. She thought how, in her own weak

way, she might confirm and strengthen this strange being.

“I can feel for you,” she said, softly, “indeed I can. But I would not give way, if you would listen to me. I would fight bravely—as I know you have done,” she added, colouring a little at her own boldness; “you would struggle on, and you would find strength as you went on, and you would, at the end, conquer, and conquer splendidly. You should do that, Mr. Romaine, and you would be helped by the sympathies of your friends.”

She was quite excited, and he looked at her half astonished, half interested. The look, however, was gradually gliding into a sneer. “But no,” he said, “I won’t. I was going to be sarcastic about ‘struggles,’ &c., but I won’t. Thank you. I really do thank you for your advice. Not that I think it will profit me, for I am past that, but I thank you all the same.”

“But,” she went on more eagerly still, “you *must* let it profit you. You will try, I am sure. A little will do it. It is only a sacrifice, and we must all make sacrifices.”

“Well,” he said, a little roughly, “and was I not willing to make sacrifices? I went through it all, and suffered, God knows how much. No matter! the thing was done, and here is the whole thing to

begin again. But I forget, you don't know what I am talking of."

"But I do," said Mrs. Fermor, with a naïve toss of her head. "I have heard, and, indeed, I sympathise."

"Well, so far, at least, I have done well—for tonight I mean—come!" said Mr. Romaine.

"Yes," said she, "but you must go on: we must encourage you."

"It is very hard," he said, with a sigh. "Look over there, and say if it is not very hard."

Mrs. Fermor looked over, with great curiosity, and saw a fair snowy girl—a little insipid, perhaps—"cream laid"—but tall and fair, sitting and smiling, and receiving polite adoration from two gentlemen.

"There!" said Mr. Romaine, bitterly; "that was once my Marguerite. She has married Valentine after all, and become homely. Look at him over there—Fatuity incorporate! Yet Valentine is restless and troubled in his mind. He doesn't relish Marguerite's doings. I almost wish he may be more troubled yet."

"Hush, hush!" said Mrs. Fermor, with coquetish reproof. "You have promised to struggle, recollect."

"And how am I to do it? I am alone. I have no one to help me—to encourage me."



Mrs. Fermor smiled.

¶

“We will all do our best. That is not much, but we will try.”

“If,” said Mr. Romaine, looking at her fixedly, “there was any one who would bear with me, and talk with me, and whisper good things now and again, and say kind words of encouragement when I felt my strength giving way——” He stopped and waited a moment.

With great eagerness, and longing to make a neophyte of him, and have the glory of converting one of these rude rough splendidly savage men, Mrs. Fermor said, with a smile, that *she* would be glad to have this Samaritan office—now and again.

Alas! This was but a fatal species of missionary labour, and Miss Manuel, sweeping by on Lord Puttenham’s arm to her chair, saw the two faces close together, and the little innocent delight in Mrs. Fermor’s, and a sort of flash of triumph in the other’s. Behind Miss Manuel was walking Nemesis like a page.

## CHAPTER THE THIRD.

## A DISCOVERY AND A MISSION.

YOUNG BRETT did not come that night until late. Miss Manuel had been looking for him, and beckoned to him from the door, where he had made one of the herd. He flew to her. "Sit down beside me," she said. "Get that chair." A lady, with the true selfishness which is roused by chairs, and chairs only, was adroitly spreading herself over two chairs, which she seemed to occupy debatably—not wholly on or wholly off. Another claimant she would have frozen off with look, manner, and answer. But there was a good-humoured graciousness about Young Brett which saved him, and a sort of homage which she took as payment for the chair. He was allowed to take it.

"My dear child," said Miss Manuel, "you have

been always so true, and so kind, and so faithful to me, and to us all, that I would ask of you things that I would not ask of others. Would you do something for me now—something very troublesome, and very important?”

“O,” said Young Brett, in a tumult of gratitude—it was as though she had accepted the gun at last—“how kind, how good of you! *Now* you are making me happy. What is it?”

She was indeed making him happy. For months he had been panting to get an opportunity to do something for her. He thought it was money, and he had plunged his hand eagerly into his pocket.

Miss Manuel smiled. “No, no,” she said, “not that. Then I may tell you? Would you go on a journey for me?”

Young Brett half jumped up. “Is that it? To be sure. When—now? Though—O my goodness!” and his face fell. “I have to join the day after to-morrow. What shall I do?”

“Join, of course,” said she, good humouredly. “I must go myself—I shall not get any one else.”

“But I *must* go,” said he, in real distress. “I shall manage it—leave it to me. I know some one that will get it for me—and if they don’t, why—I am beginning to get very tired of the whole business—and——”

“Not for the world!” said she, in real alarm. “You must not think of it.”

“But I see how it can be done,” he said, joyfully, “and without that. Leave it to me. Where do you want me to go?”

“First, then,” said she, “it is to be secret. The place is Beaumaris, in Wales, and the house is called Bangor House, looking on the green. Now, I want you to go down, lodge there for a week or ten days, and find out all about the people who lodged there before—that is, seven or eight months ago. It will be useful for me to know. Mind, everything. Everything will be welcome, and everything useful. Will you think it cruelly unreasonable to do this?”

She saw delight in his face, and gratitude too, for being chosen for such a mission.

“This is really kind,” he said; “I was getting so bored with London. I was really thinking of a week at Bangor, or some of those places. It just falls in nicely—that is, I mean,” he added, growing grave as he thought of his first statement, “if I had got leave.”

“Hu-sh!” came from Lord Puttenham; “no talking, please! H-ush!”

In fact, the second part was beginning, and Ragwitz Béla was now giving his great Hungarian solo, Verbocsy Czárdás, in which he first “agonised,” and swung, and shocked, and wailed, and quivered through a “*largo appassionato*,” and presently was plucking, and tearing, and mangling his strings (as though they had been his own hair) through ten

terrible spasms, called "variations." He worried his violin as though it were a rat; he seemed to long to bring his teeth into play, and to work at it with that extra power. He dug his fingers into its bowels, and seemed to root and tear at its heart. He made it yell and groan and crack; and, at the end of each variation, tucked it violently under his arm, as it were to smother it up like a child, and mopped his face and hands in moist exhaustion. This was Ragwitz Béla and his solo, which at last happily ended.

Later on, Mr. Romaine was looking with interest on his pleasant little missionary. Said he to her, with a sort of low plaintive music he would throw into his voice: "I have a rude log-house of my own, rude and unfurnished as myself. Civilised people call it "Chambers." There I can be as lonely and as savage as I like. Sometimes the Charitable come and see me, and relieve my wants. I have curiosities to show—something that would amuse. At least, people tell me so. I could get your friend Miss Manuel to come, and if you would care to meet her there, to-morrow evening, say at five——"

But Mrs. Fermor shrunk away from this scheme. Alarm came into her face. Mr. Romaine was hurrying on too fast, and this was being too bold. She answered coldly, and yet with agitation:

“No, no. I never go anywhere in *that* way. Don't ask me, please. No—I am very sorry.”

She seemed to awake suddenly. All the new Missionary Ordination had gone for nothing. Mr. Romaine did not relish any plan of his being rejected; so he rose hastily, and flung himself on his feet. “Very well,” he said. “With all my heart. I am sorry. But it can't be helped.” He stalked away to the door. (“He is a dangerous person,” thought Mrs. Fermor, looking after him in dread.) At the door he passed Miss Manuel.

“Poor Romaine!” she said. “Keep up your heart. Things will go better another time, and in another direction. But recollect, I warned you! You think a little too highly of yourself!”

“I shall not go with you to supper to-night,” he said. “At least, I have half determined not to. But it is not over yet, *that* little business.”

Lady Laura Fermor had sat unto the end—would have sat had it been hours longer. Faithful captain! She had ceased to suffer pain. A sort of dull numbness came on. One would have said she was enjoying pleasure, for she hung out mechanical smiles, like Signs, at regular intervals. And she found her reward. For the youth, Lord Spendlesham, whose father was happily dead (within three months, but the boy had really shown feeling in keeping himself retired so long), was there in

decent black gloves, and had actually got to a chair beside Blanche. He was rich, empty, vain, and foolish—a combination of good qualities that Lady Laura always admired.

At the end of Lord Puttenham's musical party, Miss Manuel was at the door, on the inside, and people, as they passed, had little flying "chats," each no longer than ten seconds. That night she was to have one of her compact little suppers, and she was enrolling a few. Young Brett, with confidence and the brightness of hope on his little forehead, posted past her. There was meaning in his eyes. She was talking with Westley Kerr, an agreeable man, when Young Brett said, meaningly, as he passed, and with secret mystery :

"Bangor House, Beaumaris—all right, Miss Manuel!" and she smiled to him that he was right.

But the next instant a face was put round the door from the outside—Major Carter's face, but so drawn and contorted, so contracted with fury, terror, and wonder, that Miss Manuel hardly knew it. It was laid against the sill of the door, and came close to hers.

"Take care!" he said. And though the voice was low and hoarse, he broke into the old trained smile. "Take care, I warn you! What you are doing is dangerous. I tell you in time, take care, or——"

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“Take care!” said Lord Puttenham’s cheery voice. “Good gracious! what is Miss Manuel to take care of, Carter?”

“Of the draught, my lord,” said Major Carter, pleasantly. “Standing in these doorways is a little perilous. I give warning in time always.”

A flash of fire passed from Miss Manuel’s eyes direct to his face. “I have a strong constitution,” she said, “and fear nothing!”



## CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

## TO EUSTON-SQUARE.

FERMOR had been watching restlessly from a distance. Somehow he was troubled and disturbed in his mind on the subject of Miss Manuel. He had an uneasy sensitiveness about being overlooked by her, and to his ears had drifted a whisper of the coming "little supper." Westley Kerr—"a trading wit," a "mere professional ladies' man" (this was the disparaging description in his mind)—had passed him with a sort of exulting patronage. "They want me at the Manuel house to-night. One of the old little suppers, you know. Not going? Why, I thought *you* were an intimate there."

He strode across to her. "She cannot mean," he thought, "to mark me in this fashion."

“ Good night,” said Miss Manuel to him. “ I am going a little earlier. I have a few choice friends to-night. You, unhappily, are disqualified. I have rules which you know, and which I cannot break through.”

He bit his lips and almost “ bridled” with mortification.

“ No, no,” she said, suddenly altering her tone. “ Look over there! I am getting fond of *her*. I want you to be domestic—to be a proper model family man—a chronicler of the beer. You understand. Seriously I wish this. You have all the virtues for home life, and I want you to cultivate them. You will shine in that department, whereas in our poor company of fools and triflers you would be lost. So I tell you, candidly, I am not going to ask you.”

There was a surprising mixture of contempt, badinage, and haughtiness, in the way she spoke these words. Fermor was altogether overpowered, and could hardly reply.

“ O, as you please,” he said; “ you have, of course, the right to do so.”

“ Of course I have,” she said, laughing. “ Now go, and let me *see* you in a conjugal light. It will be a treat. I must gather my little flock together, now. Where is Mr. Romaine?”

Mr. Romaine had just left Mrs. Fermor, having brought her up from Lord Puttenham’s slender

restoratives. She had been very earnest, and prettily earnest, in her work of conversion, and was quite elated with her progress.

For that whole evening almost she had purposely "kept Mr. Romaine to herself," and he had not even spoken to the blonde bride. She had indeed aided him in his brave struggle. Fermor came up to her chafing and disgusted. "We must come away," he said, somewhat roughly. "We have had more than enough of this place. I am sure you can't want to stay longer."

The tone jarred on Mrs. Fermor in her present missionary excitement. She was beginning to be deeply hurt by her husband's late neglect. She could not help answering,

"You have not helped to make it so agreeable to me." (This was in the carriage going home.)

"Ah!" he answered, "I suppose you will now go straight to your father, and bring me to judgment before him. We always had tell-tales at school."

This was the key-note—how the rest of the air was played may be conceived.

They entered their house in silence. She went up-stairs without a word; he was turning into his study for a moody and hopeless meditation, almost raging against that cold heartless woman, whom he had now finally done with, when a

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page came to the door and handed him a note. It ran :

“ Can you forgive me? I have been worried the whole night, and took it into my head to *try* you. You came out of it angelically. It is all my own helplessness, and I suppose I do not know how to treat you. Of course you would not come *now*. I have no right to expect it: and yet—there *is* a place at the round table. “ P. M.”

Hesitating, pleased, angry, fretful, elated, doubtful, Fermor at last went forth slowly, got into a cab, and drove away to Alfred-place.

Mrs. Wrigley had sat and suffered through Lord Puttenham’s musical party. Major Carter had been at her feet, figuratively, the whole night. He had talked to her of his finer friends, and the finer houses where he was intimate. All her life—which had been strongly impregnated with the City—she had panted and thirsted after the choice hunting-grounds of society. She listened with curiosity and an oily glance of tenderness. The major was rapidly drawing near to the golden gates of proposal, when he would knock and show his papers, and beg that he might be allowed to pass.

He had just gone to look for the heavy old-

fashioned chariot, and was coming back with news of it (he had stopped outside the door to have speech with some friend), when he heard those Welsh names which had contorted his face so terribly. For a moment he had forgotten the old swinging chariot, and the lady who swung in it; but the smooth look had come back to his face again, and he was presently carefully and kindly guiding Mrs. Wrigley down stairs. At the chariot door she said—there was a coquettishness in this interview at the chariot door—“You will come tomorrow, Major Carter, at the usual hour. We shall expect you. I shall be not at home for ‘those men.’” (Alas! for poor Hoblush and Punsher Hill!)

But the major’s face was overcast. He answered in trouble: “I am so sorry, *so* grieved; but pressing business calls me away to the country tomorrow.”

Anxious lines came upon his face as he spoke, and he looked round restlessly and absently. Mrs. Wrigley languished, said he must be sure and not stay away long; and coquettishly pulled the glass of the old chariot between her and the major, as she thought she had already risked scandal.

Major Carter walked away to Hans-place. He found his son up—a quiet, unquestioning, and dutiful youth, of whom he often complained that he had to find brains for him, and thought, and a

sort of earthly providence. He accepted his father in every situation without so much as a doubt, which was an advantage. He was a handsome youth, too.

The impatience and contortion that was on the major's face in the room of the fashionably smooth smirk he had taken out with him, struck young Carter; but he asked no questions.

"Where's that old Bradshaw," said the major, roughly, "that was knocking about here? Now, when it is wanted, it can't be got."

The son found it, and brought it. As the father's face was bent over the lamp to read, the light played upon worn furrows and gullies, and strange twists of sour impatience.

"It will answer," he said, "for a wonder. Where's that hand-bag?"

He began to thrust a few things into it, talking as he did so. "I have to go away for a couple of days. Don't mention to any one that I am out of the house. Now mind! Not a word! Good God, how I am persecuted! I shall just catch a heavy train. Good-by!"

Major Carter hurried out of the house, carrying his hand-bag, and shut the door softly behind him. He got into a cab. He passed Lord Puttenham's house, where the lights were still in the windows, where the link-boys were still shouting hoarsely,

and where the hall door, opening now and again, showed a patch of brilliancy.

By that time Mrs. Wrigley was at her dressing-glass, being unscrewed and ungirthed, and approaching more nearly the normal figure of a Seal. Softly amorous of her admirer, she was receiving the hired homage of her maid.

At Euston-square, Major Carter asked for a ticket for Bangor, and got ready for a dreary and miserable night.

## CHAPTER THE FIFTH.

### MISS MANUEL'S "LITTLE SUPPER."

HARDING HANAPER, M.P., her Majesty's Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Westley Kerr, Doctor Jay, F.R.S., and Mrs. Jay, Colonel Langton, C.B., Gr. Gds., and Webster—some way always spoken of without the homage of "Mr.," or the familiarity of a christian name, a dry saturnine satirist, rather inclined to be silent—these formed the fringe of Miss Manuel's little supper-table. The company were in spirits, and came inclined to be gay. The fire was blazing, the table was lighted with pink wax in white china candlesticks. Everything was delicate and inviting.

Webster settled his napkin about his limbs with anticipatory satisfaction. "I think Puttenham



gives the best parties in London," he said. "There are none I like so well."

Harding Hanaper, fair and simpering, and considered to be a young official of great promise, knew there was something masked under this speech. "Come," he said, "explain." He had almost said, "will the Honourable Member explain."

"They fit the mind for enjoyment," said Webster, appraising the dishes. "Don't you see? It is like being in jail for a year, or being on a regimen, and *then* eating what you like—or on a desert island, or in a spiritual retreat, or——He takes good care to leave no knives and forks in the way. What a narrow soul the man has!"

This was like the "curée" at Fontainebleau. The huntsman had given the signal, and the hounds all fell, full cry, upon the Puttenham stag.

"The prostration that comes on me in that place," said Harding Hanaper, bathing his hand in his long hair, "the languor, the loathing of life——"

"And of office, I suppose! Eh?" said Webster. "And his fiddlers! Where does he get those horrible beings? If, indeed, it was anticipating a place of final punishment—or it was a pantomime and demons were wanted——"

Miss Manuel's supper consisted of delicate game

and other dainties. Champagne lay cooling in the centre, like an Indian belle on an ottoman enjoying the punkah.

Now Fermor entered with a sort of shyness, for he found a ring of faces that were strange to him. But Miss Manuel sheltered him promptly.

"Here is a place next to me, Captain Fermor. Mr. Hanaper, become acquainted with Captain Fermor, and help him!" Then, in a low voice, "I see you are not too proud; and you might have humiliated me. So, I am grateful."

"I saw you at Lord Puttenham's," said Harding Hanaper, graciously, and again dipping his hand in his hair.

"Escape of another convict from Portland," said Webster, suddenly. "So I see by the evening papers. Let us drink him." And he bowed to Fermor ceremoniously; and they all drank to him.

"Seems a regular outbreak," said Mr. Romaine.

Fermor was pleased at this company, though he recollected Romaine at once. Miss Manuel had a way of making it felt among her subjects that she wished a protégé to be respected, and Romaine, though he did not relish Fermor, and would have liked, as he had said before, "to break him like a stick upon his knee," yet still was trained to affect a sort of respect towards him. Even "Webster," ready to crunch him, as he was crunching the

*Never Forgotten.*

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Fermor was flattered by this universal homage. In the rest, towards each other, there was a republican familiarity which almost made him shiver. About "Webster" especially there was a good-humoured bitterness and shortness—long silences, during which he was busy with his snipe; and when he was casting about for more, coming out with something short and smart. Every now and again he squeezed an intellectual lemon.

"I shall help myself; Miss Manuel," he said, stretching over to the champagne. "The new Miss Jenkinson, who has just come out! Look! She shines and glistens like this bottle."

They laughed at this simile.

"The neck," he said, looking at it sideways, "so reminds me. Only her mother has taken the tinfoil, and the wires, and the cord, and made them into a mob-cap! Ha! ha!"

"For shame!" said Miss Manuel; "a poor girl just come out. She takes very well," I can assure you."

"Not so well as this dear girl," he said, patting the flask. "Her mother may send her back to the family bin in the country."

Fermor listened, and said something in his old manner, which was welcomed with general cordiality. He was not altogether an outlaw, he

felt. This was something like the old life. He kept up a kind of confidential talk with Miss Manuel. Under that soft light she seemed to glow, and glitter, and flash, like a precious stone.

"I ought to be at home," he said, in the old half-injured tone he was so fond of. "It is my proper place. I have been told so, at least. I am more fitted to adorn humdrum life than this sort of scene."

"Ah! you are thinking of the way I behaved to-night. I know you are," she said, looking down. "I am so strange, and behave so strangely. I have Spanish blood in me, and I must curb myself in everything I like—even mortify myself—or else I don't know where I should end!"

With a sort of glimpse of the meaning of this mysterious language, Fermor waited to hear more.

"You don't know me," she said, hurriedly. "I am one of those natures that must rule myself, or be ruled by myself. Sometimes I dare not trust myself. Is it not better, then," she added, half piteously, "to run the risk of seeming rough, and brusque, and blunt—and, in fact, what you are not, than——?" She paused.

"Than what?" said Fermor, almost tremulously interested, for now he was seeing quite distinctly.

Romaine was looking on from across the table—perhaps listening. Fermor saw the contemptuous

glance on his lip, and was pleased. Of course *he* was not pleased at the preference, and this put Fermor into great good humour.

Soon Miss Manuel fell again into the same tone. "Do *you* like this sort of thing?" she said, in a half melancholy tone. "I think I shall not have them again—I shall give them up."

"Why do *that*?" said Fermor, in a gentle remonstrance.

"Why have them?" said she, looking at him.

Fermor smiled.

"You are smiling," she said, "because you know me, and how little able I am to keep to a resolution. You know I went out to-night with a firm resolve *not* to ask you here. I bound myself up, almost by a vow, and yet here you are, sitting next to me."

Again Fermor smiled. The old armour was still bright, and the sword still sharp. "What have I done?" he said, in a low voice. "I know I have many faults; but still——"

"More," she went on, "I want you to promise me one thing, that you will be generous——"

"Generous!" repeated Fermor.

"Yes, generous," she said. "You have conquered me to-night. Let me have some little victories in future. I *want* to train myself, and shall do so. Why not let me? You have everything at home, why not be content? No, we shall have

no more little suppers. I want to live in the world as I have hitherto done—without heart, or softness, or esteem, or regard—in what is called the hollow world. You understand me. Do, I conjure you, let me, and rub Alfred-place out of the map of London.”

Some one struck in at this point, and with a sentence came between Fermor and Miss Manuel. When she returned to him, she said, “Do you know who was to have been here to-night, or at least I asked him? Poor John Hanbury.”

Fermor started and coloured. “He has come back,” she said; “he has been doing the savage travelling, Gabooning it, and that kind of thing. He never cared for it really; but I suspect, poor fellow,” she added, in a low voice, “he had another object besides gorilla skins. He wanted to get rid of his old self. You see,” she added, slowly, “he was very sensitive, and allowed things to take hold of his mind, which another more sensible would have fought off. And the worst is, he is come back just the same as when he went out, after all the Gabooning.”

Fermor did not lift his eyes. Was this a reproach of hers, or merely accidental?

“Poor soul!” she went on, “(poor fool! Webster over there would say,) he is greatly altered. You remember, he was a sort of rosy, hearty, farmer-like creature. Now you would not know him;

he is a dry, gaunt, silent being. Ah, the poor old John Hanbury!" she added, mournfully. "He died out with the dead past. The iron has entered into his soul, as Webster would say, in his comic way."

She laughed a little harshly, and rose. "Now," she said, gaily, "for the drawing-room; there is a better fire there."

During this little supper Miss Manuel's brother had sat silent, and apparently moody. They accepted him as such, and no remark was made. He had altered a good deal since the Eastport days, wore a large coal-black beard, while his black bright eyes roved from side to side with a look of inquiry. Sometimes he spoke; but he usually seemed to have something on his mind, and was reckoned "odd." Still he was accepted as a useful male chaperon for his sister. She was always noticed as being very kind and gentle to him, almost humouring him.

When they had gone up into the drawing-room, Harding Hanaper, who affected the character of the overworked official, who could yet by ability combine late hours and pleasure with all the drudgery of business, came over to Miss Manuel for some private talk. He leant his elbow on the chimney-piece. The others were boisterously pleasant.

"I shall have to be up at six," he said, languidly,



"to make up for this. A shoal of people will be wanting answers by to-morrow. I must look into their papers before I go to bed. Old Pocock—*your* friend, Miss Manuel, he calls himself—is persecuting us at the office. I believe we shall have to give him something—for *your* sake." Miss Manuel opened her great eyes with surprise, or indifference. It might be either. "I believe he would be glad to get even the Lee-Boo Coast, poor soul; he has come very low indeed."

"The Lee-Boo Coast!" said Webster, striking in; "who are you sending out there? Who are Harding Hanaper's enemies? It is rank murder."

"The average of human life on that coast," said Mr. Hanaper, placidly, "is, we are assured, from eighteen months to two years. The salary is but nine hundred pounds. So it really amounts to this: we buy a man's life from say thirteen hundred to eighteen hundred pounds. We can't get a bishop at all."

"What! the sheen of an Apron all unavailing?" said Webster, with a sneer.

"It will be vacant in two or three months," said Harding Hanaper; "the two years are nearly run out. Yet old Pocock is wild for the place. I suppose we must let him have it. We can give him nothing else. He is too old, and too old fashioned."

With gentle persuasion, and almost seductive

intercession, Miss Manuel made a request to the official. "You must spare him," she said, "for my sake. I will not have my old man sacrificed on the Lee-Boo Coast. He would die in a week."

"But he will die in a week if we do not send him," said Mr. Hanaper. "He looks quite worn and fretful with anxiety."

"No matter," said Miss Manuel, "he shan't be murdered officially. We shall keep him at home for his own good—like a child."

"Very well," said Harding Hanaper; "I shall recollect your orders at the proper time."

The little gay cohort was gone and scattered; and Miss Manuel was left alone with her brother. It was past two. As usual, the brightness fled suddenly from her face. A strange, weary, and hopeless look came in its place. The brother looked at her gloomily, and with eyes rolling darkly.

"This life!" she said, "my soul revolts against it. I am sick at heart. It is turning me into a demon."

"I never took my eyes off him to-night," said her brother, gloomily, "never. I was thinking how strange to have him so near me, and to be so calm and friendly with him. Ah! he little knew!"

"But this is all so wicked—so *horribly* wicked," said she, starting up. "How can I go on with it?"

Only to-night to see that poor soft child—whom I am really getting to love—to see her falling gradually into the power of that bold man."

His face lightened. "And she is? I thought so to-night. All is going well, then." Then suddenly changing his voice, "No, Pauline, no going back now. I won't *have* it. Or," he added, slowly, and with a meaning that *she* understood, "if you are tired of the business, or have forgotten what we owe to our darling, whom at one time *you* said was murdered, as much as a girl was murdered by knife, or rope, or poison, why—have done with it, then, and leave it *all* to me. *My* course shall be shorter, and perhaps sharper."

"No, no," she said, hastily. "I don't wish that. But the poor girl that loves me, who is trustful and gentle, why must *she* be destroyed?"

"Every one of them," said he, savagely. "We shall spare none. I am glad she is soft and trustful and tender, very glad. So much the better. Violet was soft and tender too. Ah, poor darling! and how was *she* treated?"

There was a pause. Pauline then spoke. "I am not equal to this sort of struggle," she said; "it is confusing me. My head seems to be flying round. No matter, as you say, we must go on."

Fermor went home that night in a state of wild exultation. He still "lived;" he was not

in a state of "social dotage," thank Heaven! The old power survived. It was wonderful the curious attraction he still exercised on every one coming within his sphere. He was passive. He had long since ceased to care for these little triumphs; but the old power remained, in spite of influences whose interest it was to hold him in contempt and subjection.

As he entered his hall the clock struck two. He went up-stairs softly, still smiling to himself. The door of the settlement on the stairs opened, and the grim Carlay figure stood before him, with a light in its hand. "Come in here," it said.

Fermor's recent triumph had made him defiant. This sudden return to the rude prose of life jarred on him. "I cannot," he said. "You must excuse me to-night. You must put off your remonstrance, or lecture, until the morning."

Mr. Carlay made three strides towards him, and grasped his arm as in a steel vice. "No trifling," he said. "You know me! Stay, then, where you are, and listen to me. I gave you a warning a short time ago. How are you attending to that warning?"

Fermor burst out in a fury. "This yoke is getting intolerable!" he said, drawing back. "What title have you to lecture me and bring me to account in this way? Once for all, Mr. Carlay, I give you notice——"

"Once for all," said the other, "I give you notice. Take care what you are doing. Do you suppose this tone of yours has any effect on me? I am not thinking of myself now, but of *her*. And I tell you solemnly, and I call Heaven to witness," here his long stiff arm was lifted, "that this must not, and shall not, go on! And I charge you to take care what you are doing. For I have snatched my daughter from death once before, and I will not have her life risked again. *Mind*. There have been desperate passages in my life that you cannot guess at. And if warnings are of no use, and it comes to this, that there is to be a choice of lives between hers and any other's—no matter whose it is—there shall not be a moment's hesitation. Her life before all: my life after hers cheerfully. So—take care. I know where you were to-night. Forswear *that* house. You will find her in the drawing-room. Good night!"

He disappeared into his settlement. Fermor was left in darkness. In presence of this being he lost his self-possession. But he was almost scared by the dark meaning of his significant hints, which he could not but accept as genuine. The cold withering sarcasm and contempt of his look and manner, as he met the weary, injured, anxious face of his wife in the drawing-room, it would be hard to describe.

"Where *have* you been?" she said.

He threw the very concentration of contempt and anger into his look and manner. "Though you may run to tell your father and protector of this speech, I *shall* tell you this much: You shall never, between you, reduce me to such abject slavery! I tell you this much: I shall never forget to-night. Fortunately, there are places, outside *this* house, where I am still liked and appreciated. I shall say no more."

Mrs. Fermor was not of the guild of suffering wives. She was warm and quick of temper. Her bright eyes flashed. She answered him with the heat of wounded pride and repelled affection. That was all for himself, she said. He was welcome to choose his house, and to choose his company. With glowing cheeks she drew herself up with proud defiance, and said that *she*, too, was independent, and could find amusement and appreciation elsewhere. As to what he said about "tale bearing," she scorned it.

She was still in her Puttenham finery — in her tulles and flowers and "low neck." The wreath was on her little head, and the flowers rustled and shook as she spoke with trembling voice, and threw down this challenge to her husband.

He was astonished. "So this is the way you meet me, then," he said. "With all my heart! You have me at an advantage. I have been bought

and sold. This is one of the grand mistakes of life found out too late! Poor Eastport! Ah!"

Mrs. Fermor understood that allusion perfectly. It confirmed her. "Very well!" she said.

That very night, or morning rather, Mrs. Fermor went to the devonport, and, with compressed lips and trembling fingers, wrote a little note. The little note was to Mr. Romaine. It was prettily and coquettishly worded, saying that she would be at his Chambers at five o'clock; and she was so eager it should reach him promptly, that she sent out her maid to post it in the nearest "pillar box." After she had done this, her pink lips were pressed together a little vindictively, and she walked to her room in indignant triumph.

## CHAPTER THE SIXTH.

## MR. ROMAINE GROWING "STEADY."

IN the Fermor household the furies of conjugal discord were tossing their torches violently. But they were genteel furies, and created no public disturbance, and a chilling and bitter politeness was their chief instrument.

Mrs. Fermor, in a sort of excitement, dressed herself the next afternoon for a little expedition. She felt a sort of flutter, as though it were an enterprise of great moment and anxiety. But she was determined to be free and independent, and to do something that would *commit* her to being free and independent. And in a little quiet brougham, that was sometimes hired for her, and glowing like a fresh pulled rose, she drove away to Mr. Romaine's "log-house."

She stepped out boldly, and almost gave a wistful



look up and down the street, in the hope that Captain Fermor might be passing by, to see her glove thrown down.

Such a "log-house" indeed; that is, accepting the richest stuffs, the most gorgeous arms, gold, silver, china, leopard skin rugs, and filigree lamps, as the rude materials with which log-houses are ornamented. Mr. Romaine came out and met her at the door like a sultan from his palace.

She looked in timorously, and shrank back. For the sultan had no one with him. "Afraid?" he said. "Quite right. I was prepared. With you I had asked all the polite conventionalities, but they have not come."

"It is not that," said Mrs. Fermor; "but you told me our friend Miss Manuel was to be here."

"Well, so I did; but I can see you won't come in."

Mrs. Fermor drew back again. "No, no," she said, "you could scarcely ask me. Married ladies do not pay visits to gentlemen in this way."

Mr. Romaine gave a loud and genuine laugh. "If all these caftans, and cloaks, and damascened blades had tongues, how noisily they would contradict you."

Mrs. Fermor looked at him with a little alarm, and turned to go.

His voice became soft of a sudden, and entreat-  
ing. "What, no comfort to-day for the poor lonely

outcast! No encouragement! If you were only to know how much better I feel since last night—how much *stronger* and better able to struggle—— But what is this to you?”

“A great deal,” said Mrs. Fermor, warmly; “it gives me more pleasure than anything I could hear. But you must promise me to go on, and do your best.”

“Why should I?” he said, gloomily. “No one cares to help me. Look here,” he said; “read *that*. Just sent here, not ten minutes before you came. And I am expected to be steady and keep straight.”

It was a sort of Lilliputian note, signed “Virginia Massinger,” the name of the fair blonde girl. It said that she was coming that afternoon to see him, and to talk over old times.

Mrs. Fermor was astounded.

“Now, you see,” he said, “how *I* live, and what I have to go through. The best way is not to affect anything quixotic, but to go by the old road. So now, good-by, Mrs. Fermor. Let me see you down, and then to order tea for Mrs. Massinger.”

Mrs. Fermor paused. She was a warm, impulsive creature, and full of enthusiasm. She seemed to hear a secret call to her, to help, and protect this strange, struggling, even noble heart, who was so unfairly tried. Her cheek glowed as she turned and said:

"No, no; we must do what we can for you. I won't desert you. So come and show me your curiosities."

She was bewildered with the treasures that he exhibited; and he illustrated them so agreeably, with such a pleasant commentary, that an hour slipped away. No Mrs. Massinger came, however; for though Mr. Romaine had indeed received a note from her, he had written one in reply, pleading business for that evening, but fixing the same hour for the next day. How he talked, and almost bewailed the miserable state of his soul—a kind of wreck now—while Mrs. Fermor listened with a sort of devotion to the curious scraps and hints, patches of his life, which he allowed to escape him carelessly, as it were, and which had for her young soul an unavoidable interest—may be conceived.

"This is so good of you," he said; "so kind, so thoughtful. Is it profane or disrespectful to say that you have been my guardian angel? When I see you there before me, or rather when I *think* of your advice (is it not absurd almost, I that have rubbed through the world, the wise and experienced man, wanting advice!), I feel so strong. But of course I cannot hope for more. Still, for what is past, accept my most grateful thanks, Mrs. Fermor."

She, thinking herself a perfect little monument

of wisdom, shook her finger at him. "It all depends," she said, "on how you behave."

Driving away, at first she was in a sort of elation; then fell into some little misgivings and troubles. Why had not Miss Manuel and the other lady come too? She thought of her then as of a dear friend, and indeed her heart had lately been turning to Pauline with almost a sort of affection and yearning. She was so splendid and brilliant, she admired her, and she was so kind and encouraging. She thought she would go and see her, and tell her her little troubles; then bade the coachman drive away to Alfred-place.

At the door of the house was standing a sober practical brougham; and a sober practical figure was letting himself out slowly, and shutting the door behind him leisurely, as though it were the leaf of a wardrobe. He went up the steps sharply, and rang the bell sharply, as who should say, "An hour contains sixty guineas, not sixty minutes."

Mrs. Fermor knew him to be a doctor. They told her at the door that Miss Manuel had been taken ill that morning, and was in a raging fever.

She had been so full of little schemes for confidence, for consultation, for kind sympathy towards this friend, whom she had determined to make a cherished inmate of, and love, and honour, that the news came on her like a blow. It roused

up all the enthusiasm of her young heart. "I will go in," she said. "I will go up to her. O, this is dreadful! Where is the room?"

Half way up the stairs, she met a dark figure with black beard and gleaming eyes, who barred her passage. "I am sorry," he said, "we cannot see you. My sister is seriously ill. Another time."

"But," said she, almost piteously, "I am her friend. I *want* to see her. I am Mrs. Fermor, tell her."

He started forward; his eyes flashed. "You Mrs. Fermor!" he said. "Not a step, please! I must request you will go. She is ill, and half unconscious: so *I* am master now. A pleasant surprise for her, indeed! You must go away, and go home, and I must beg you won't come here again."

Really frightened and overpowered, Mrs. Fermor hurried down stairs. The gleaming eyes, and a sort of restrained ferocity in his manner, scared her. She went home full of grief and confusion. "She has no one to help her," she thought. "Only a woman like me could be her nurse. Noble, generous nature?" And Mrs. Fermor, full of enthusiasm and excitement, longed to be a sort of hospital nurse.

On the next evening, Mr. Romaine came stalking into the room. This visit she did not relish; at least, its boldness alarmed her. She tried to

assume a little cold manner, but he was so earnest and eager that she put it aside at once.

"You have heard," he said, "about our friend Miss Manuel. It is dreadful, poor, poor girl."

"But is she better?" said Mrs. Fermor, wistfully.

"She is in danger," said he, "serious danger. She has worked herself into this fit, and of course all her fine friends will fly the house like a plague."

Mrs. Fermor clasped her hands fervently. "Indeed, I tried yesterday," she said, "to get to her. I feel for her. I hardly slept last night thinking of her. But there was a terrible man there, who turned me away."

"I know," said he; "that was her brother."

"I would give the world," she went on, "to get to see her, to watch over her, to sit up with her at nights, and be like a Sister of Charity to her."

"You would?" he said, with great interest. "Are you serious? There is a good deal of the theatre and poetry about 'watching' and vigils, &c., which may, perhaps, be leading you astray."

A little wounded, Mrs. Fermor looked at him sadly, without speaking.

"No, no," he said, "I am only joking. That rough speech was not meant for *you*. I believe in you—a little. But if you are in earnest, come with me now!"

"Come with *you*?" she said, wondering.

"Yes," he said, smiling, "I am a sort of gnome, or genii. I can unlock doors and get into houses by mysterious agency. Will you come? But no! prudery has its claims, even on an occasion like this. She is the Moloch of our day."

Mrs. Fermor's eyes sparkled. She seemed to feel a holy sort of call. The devotion of the Sister of Charity was before her eyes. "I will go," she said, "and I will trust you."

He got a cab, and she set off with Mr. Romaine. She was actually proud of her superiority to the conventional laws.

"I admire you," said Romaine, looking at her, steadily, "for the way you have done this. I do indeed. No fuss, no confusion, but practical action. I begin to believe there is some good in the world after all—and some sense."

She laughed. "You will learn in time," she said.

"Ay," he answered, gloomily, "but who will teach? You are tired of the scholar already. I saw that in your face when I came in. No matter, I suppose I must go back to the old school again. Another note this morning. Isn't it good? Here we are."

They went in, up-stairs into the drawing-room. A gentleman in black was waiting there, a tall and sorrowful-looking gentleman. Romaine nodded to him. "How d'ye do, Hanbury?" he said, and left the room.

Mrs. Fermor drooped her head a little guiltily. Hanbury looked at her sadly, and for a moment or two silently. "So you are Fermor's wife!" he said. She often thought afterwards of the sad, hopeless, and wistful look, with which he said these words. It was a little epitome of a whole history, that began with her own coming to Eastport.

Romaine came back in a few minutes. "I have seen Manuel," he said. "He has a good deal of the mule in him, but I have made him do what I like, as I do with most people," and he looked at her for a moment significantly. "Now," he continued, "you may come when you please, and stay as long as you please."

Mrs. Fermor's face glowed with a sense of grateful obligation for this service. This power of "doing," and compassing what seems difficult, is what excites the *true* reverence of women. The "almighty" man is *their* hero.

There was a soft and vital enthusiasm about her, even in little things, which was very interesting to others. She was full of quick, eager affections, and a kind of romance, and threw herself into the new duty she had chosen with an ardour and earnestness that was surprising. The brother received her gloomily, and with distrust. He was, indeed, something of a mule.



## CHAPTER THE SEVENTH.

## A NIGHT SCENE.

MISS MANUEL was tossing in the gripe of a sort of fever. "Over-excitement," said the doctor, a calm, wooden man, who, with a steady attachment for the house, came twice in the day, and twice in the day let himself out of the one-horse wardrobe at the door. He was not a gloomy man, and used to stand for several minutes by Pauline's bedside, studying her flushed face and her eyes—brighter than ever they were before—with unrestrained approbation.

"Nothing *could* be better," he would say to Mrs. Fermor, watching him wistfully, and whose heart would leap at this joyful news; "nothing *could* be better. We shall have the worst symptoms by to-morrow. Pulse not yet high enough, blood ab-

normal, and a little wandering of the brain. I should say by to-morrow at the furthest. I should like an oppression of the chest, a difficulty of breathing; but," he added, with a sigh, as if illustrating the unreasonableness of our nature, "we can't expect *everything*. Still, nothing *could* be better."

And Mrs. Fermor, wondering, and mystified and overwhelmed with deepest grief at this awful language, could only go through the usual farewell medical offices with anything but the delicacy which custom exacts. She often missed her road to the doctor's secret palm, and the piece of gold described many noisy circles on the ground before it reached its home.

Pauline was really in danger for a few days. The doctor was right, though he put it in an odd way, when he wished for the crisis and the more dangerous symptoms to pass by. The excitement in which she had been living, the strain upon her life for so long, had begun to break her down, and she was now tossing and working in the hot fiery waters of fever.

Mrs. Fermor was a perfect Sister of Charity. She sat by her all day, and was really useful. But she longed to be able to show yet greater devotion. She would like to sit up with her all night long, a duty taken by a professional lady with a false curl.

at each side, like the volute of an Ionic capital. But the brother came pitilessly and roughly in the evening, and turned her away.

She spoke to Mr. Romaine. "I would give the world," she said, "if you could kindly manage it."

"What can I do?" he said. "I am only a rude rough being, without power of any sort. However, we will try." That evening he came to her at Miss Manuel's with good news. "I have seen the mule," he said. "We had rather a struggle, but I managed him."

Again Mrs. Fermor was suffused with gratitude. She had the greatest confidence and a sort of trusting admiration for this all-powerful man. She was going home in a flurry of delight. It was raining, and there were no cabs. He said, carelessly, "But how am I to get home?"

Still grateful, Mrs. Fermor said, proudly, "I wish I could take you home. But——"

*He* was a *true* friend, and she was almost a little proud to show to the world that in the instance of so true a friend she could be above its vile conventionalities.

"The old song and the old tune," he said, with what appeared to her real bitterness and wounded feeling. "I suppose, if we were wrecked together on some wretched island, we should be hearing about chaperons, and the other miserable pro-

prieties. Of course *you* can't help it—you only follow the crowd. They would tear you in pieces—you know they would!"

The little lady was delighted. She felt a glow of honest sympathy. "What would you say," she said, "if I did not care for the crowd and their tearing in pieces?"

"I don't believe it," he said, sadly.

"Get in," she said, triumphantly. "You deserve to go home in the rain—but I know you mean well——"

Mr. Romaine, after helping Mrs. Fermor in, had his own foot on the carriage step, when Fermor, with an angry face, came up. Romaine welcomed him with a cordial smile.

"Just putting Mrs. Fermor into her carriage to send her home to you. You are just in time."

Suspiciously, and with a sort of sneer, Fermor answered,

"It seems so!"

"Ay, so it does!" said Romaine. "Why don't you offer me a seat, Mrs. Fermor?" he added, fixing his eye upon her.

"O," she said, hastily, "you know——"

"Why, now? Come?" said Romaine.

He seemed to put this question purposely for some test of his own. Mrs. Fermor coloured a shade, hesitated, and then said, with a little forced manner:

“Well, we *shall* ask you. You must not think of walking. Where shall we set you down?”

The test, whatever it was, was successful; for Mr. Romaine smiled triumphantly. He took off his hat.

“No,” he said, “I should only crowd you. Good-by. Good-by, Fermor.”

Fermor looked after him sourly. He disliked him, and his presence at *that* house; yet, of all the men whom he had ever known, this one alone seemed to intimidate him.

“I should only crowd you too,” he said, with an ironical bow to Mrs. Fermor. “Don’t let me interfere with your arrangements.”

Mrs. Fermor was just saying, “But, Charles, Charles! I want to explain——” when he turned and walked away. She threw herself back, and bit her red lips. “Very well,” she said. “Let him go! I wish I had told him openly that I had asked Mr. Romaine in. Why should I not? I am not a child, and if *he* treats me this way——”

She drove home and came again that night for her first vigil. She was in a tremor of excitement. A great business was before her. She had dressed herself for the task, and got lamps, books, fire, arm-chair, everything, ready with earnest preparation. By ten or eleven she was sitting there alone—the attendant with the curled volutes had resigned, wounded, not to say angry—a little faithful

sentry, with bright wakeful eyes, in an arm-chair sentry-box. She was determined not to sleep on her post. Pauline was tossing there beside her. The crisis the medical visitor had wished for was at hand; but presently she became quiet and seemed to sleep. Joy and hope filled Mrs. Fermor's heart. Her trust and affection had increased with her attendance. She had never read the "wicked" Laurence Sterne, or she might have seen in his gay *Sentimental Travels* that "You take a withering twig and put it in the ground; and then you water it, because you have planted it." But Mr. Romaine had lent her a transcendental French romance, called "*L'Amour Spirituel*." (Alas! did she not occasionally lift her eyes ruefully, and strain them backwards to the days of "*Roger le Garçon*"?) And this was so dreary and "spiritual" in its sense of the peculiar relations of those who loved each other all through its pages, that the long-lashed eyelids began to droop, and by one o'clock the sentry was sleeping soundly on her post.

She woke up suddenly, startled by the sound of some one talking. There was Pauline, sitting half up in her bed, her long rich hair down over her shoulders like a veil, her eyes flashing like glowing coals, and her arms beating back the curtains beside her. In terror, Mrs. Fermor half ran towards the door—then came back—thinking how

late it was, and tried to soothe her. The glowing eyes fixed themselves suddenly on her. The fingers pointed at her, trembling.

“Send for her,” said Pauline; “quick—send for her, and see—when she comes, keep her until I come down to her.”

“Send for whom?” said Mrs. Fermor, soothing her. “For whom, darling? Lie down, do, dearest—there.”

“Keep her!” said Pauline, struggling, “until I come down to her. I wish to settle with her—and with them all. But with her and her husband first.”

A little terrified, again she tried to soothe her. “Do lie down,” she said; “you must, indeed.”

“I must tell you,” said Pauline, confidentially. “*They* don’t suspect—and she, the wife, actually thinks I have a sort of affection for her.” And Pauline laughed.

Greatly alarmed, Mrs. Fermor let her go, and shrunk away. “But who do you mean?” she said.

“Fermor—the Fermors,” she said, mournfully; “he who destroyed her—our Violet—put her to death with his own hands—took away her sweet life. Was it not a cruel and most dreadful murder? Was it not? And yet they hang people every day. But listen to me. I can tell you something. We are on their track—his and his wife’s.”

“But what harm has *she* done you?” said the other.

“Harm!” said Pauline, with a half shriek. “Who are you that ask me? Come closer. I can tell you,” added Pauline, slowly and doubtfully, “there is something about *you* very like her! Ah!” she said, again beating the curtains, “she is not far off! Send her to me quick, or I shall get up and find her myself.”

Dreadfully shocked and terrified, Mrs. Fermor ran to the bell and rang it. In a very short time the brother and some of the servants were in the room. But Mrs. Fermor did not watch again.

The doctor was right. The crisis had come and was past. Pauline began to recover. In three weeks, he said, rubbing his hands, “We are gaining strength, eh?” And certainly, accepting that community of expression, it must be said there was a sort of strength in which *he* had gained sensibly since the commencement of her illness. Later on he said, “I don’t see why we should not be kept up by the strongest beef-tea and generous port wine?” Later on still, he said, “I think we shall do—we are pretty sure to do;” and, accepting the community of the expression as before, it must be said that he had done very well indeed.

He had said, “We might be got down for an hour or two to the drawing-room, but mind, we mustn’t over-do it;” and Pauline, in consequence,



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had come down, and was sitting in the drawing-room.

The doctor had come in person to superintend this critical juncture, and looked on with pride at her as she sat on the sofa. He seemed to hint that without this supervision fatal results would have taken place. "We got her down wonderfully," he said. "It was critical. And at one moment—on the lobby there—I had misgivings." The usual amber acknowledgment was introduced, in the usual guilty way; but he whispered, "Not to *day!* No, no." This was a sort of gala or festival. There was a common link of sympathy running through us all, and why deny *us* the luxury of indulging our feelings.

## CHAPTER THE EIGHTH.

## AN EXPEDITION.

WHEN Miss Manuel was recovered or convalescent, some letters which she asked for eagerly were brought to her. She picked out three with the Beaumaris postmark—three in the handwriting of Young Brett. She opened them eagerly. They were in the shape of a sort of journal, and full of details. The honest youth, not very fluent with his pen, had sat up many nights writing everything with a fulness that he thought would give pleasure. He had gone into the work with enthusiasm, and what follows is a short history of his adventures.

It was a very wintry journey down to Bangor. At Bangor he got on board a sail ferry-boat, and made a stormy passage across with a "stiff" breeze, shipping seas every moment. "There is a long

pier of wood," wrote Young Brett, "more like a plank than a pier, by Jove!" (even in writing he could not keep clear of his favourite god,) "and the wind was blowing *so* hard, and there was no rail to hold on by, and the sea was washing over your feet. I give you my honour, Miss Manuel, this thing was a quarter of a mile long. I never saw such fun! There was an old Welsh clergyman's hat that was caught by the wind, and went flying away like a bird. I could have laughed, only the poor old soul looked so distressed. And *you* would have laughed, Miss Manuel, to have seen us all tottering along that plank, some of us screaming, some of us laughing, and some of us stopping short altogether, and afraid to go back or forwards. There was a young woman, too, with children and baskets, and she was dreadfully embarrassed between the baskets and the children. Just as we were half way across, and close to the pier, I heard a scream in front, and I saw a little child in a red cloak fall half over the edge of the plank, and there was a wave coming, and the wind blowing," &c.

Young Brett went on to say that he caught hold of the child by the hand, as if he had just stooped down to lift up any child that had tumbled on the gravel in a square. But the truth was, he had jumped forward along the edge of the slippery "stage," shot past a man who was in front of him,

and with much danger and thorough wetting, had caught hold of this little child. He raised her up, and carried her carefully and tenderly all the rest of the journey. The boat went "swirling" through the water, shipping a sea now and again, to his great delight; but he had the red-cloaked little girl on his knee all the time, and laughed for her, which she could understand, and talked English for her, which she could not, and finally set her down on dry land.

The young woman—a handsome, striking-looking young Welshwoman—was deeply grateful; not so much for the little service, for which she would have nodded her thanks to one of her own station, but for Young Brett's manner; which caused the feeling of every one he came in contact with to take *some* shape of affection, slight or strong. It was so with the cabman who took him but two streets away; with the porter who carried his portmanteau from the train to the cab; to the people who got in at one station and got out in ten minutes. Every one felt that he was good, and this young Welshwoman had the same feeling.

of them. Besides, they were very strong, and we trundled along quite cheerfully. But I was thinking if Showers, or Slack, or any of our fellows had seen me! Luckily it was dark."

Most Welsh travellers have seen the little old-fashioned, dun-coloured, remote, unfriended, pocket town called Beaumaris, which we come to along the river, and which we see jutting out before us into the water, with a sort of sham air of a tiny fortified town, with a dull resemblance to a miniature Ostend. The little dun High-street, through which no carriages travel, and whose little dun houses seem toy-houses freshly taken out of a child's toy-box; the general air as if not only the streets were diligently swept up every morning like a hearth, but that the toy-houses also were swept down; and the quiet slumber that reigned over the men and women, and the windows, and the lone common at the edge of the sea, contributed to make rather a dispiriting impression on Young Brett as he entered triumphantly drawn by his donkeys.

It was all out of the season, it being the depth of winter. The little town seemed to be laid up in ordinary, stripped, unfurnished, like a ship out of commission. Young Brett drove to the hotel of the place, and was received with a little surprise. They were all out of gear. The rooms had a mouldy air; but he was made welcome.

To one of his temper these were dispiriting influences. But he manfully struggled against them, and thought of the friend whose mission he had come down to fulfil. Later, he was sitting at some dinner in the coffee-room, when a gentleman, rubbing his hands together softly, came gliding in. "God bless me!" said Young Brett, starting up; "Major Carter! What do *you* do here?"

"Well, of all the coincidences in the world, my young friend!" said the major, casting up his eyes devoutly. "Is it not? It looks like a providence, that we two, of all men in the world, and here, of all places in the world——"

"I don't understand it," said Young Brett, bluntly.

"Recollect," said the major, "this was my home for a long time. I had good reason, unhappily, to connect me with this place. I ought to remember it. You may be sure it is no pleasure to *me* to revisit it. And now let me ask you, my young friend, what brings *you* down here, eh?"

Young Brett was as sharp and ready as he was straightforward. "Some business," he said, without hesitation. "Welsh business, major. Traveling makes one hungry, as you see."

"Welsh business?" said the major, slowly, and looking at him steadily. "For a friend, I suppose, not for yourself?"

"Common, every-day sort of thing," said Young

Brett, helping himself. "A little confidential; you understand? Otherwise——"

"I dare say, now," said Major Carter, looking at him still, "where it was a lady who could not herself so conveniently travel, and who had a smart handy enthusiastic young boy she could send in her stead, to use his eyes and pry about, and pick up facts to try and slander and ruin a man who has never done *him* any harm, eh? *That's* an honourable and a gentlemanly duty to be employed on. Eh, Mr. Brett?"

Young Brett coloured. "I don't understand; that is, I *do* understand," he added, hastily. "But I think you assume——"

"Assume?" said the major, excitedly. "You can't say that. I am behind the scenes. I know most of what goes on. You are a brave, honourable, upright fellow, and I tell you I am grieved and ashamed to see you engaged in such a business."

Young Brett was in sore distress. His lips were sealed. "You make too much of this," he said. "I have private business which I am not at liberty to mention, and so——"

"As I say," continued the major, "you are a gentleman, and have always been above dirty work. Your friend, Miss Manuel, hates me, and you know why. Because I interfered to save a friend from a match that I considered was unsuited

for him. He would have embittered the life of that poor girl. She would have been in her grave now; you know she would. The girl that he has married he is making wretched. And for this, Miss Manuel has marked me; I know it; she is determined to harass me in every way she can. I could not believe such vindictiveness in a Christian lady. I say it is shocking."

Young Brett's cheeks kindled. "Do you speak of Miss Manuel?" he said. "Those words do *not* apply to her; to her least of any one in the world. I can't sit by, Major Carter, and have her so spoken of; I will not, indeed. She is above all that—miles above it. If ever," continued Young Brett, with a trembling voice, "there was a woman noble, and generous, and *devoted* on this earth, it is she!"

"I know she has a friend in you," answered the major, quickly, "and your defence of her is honourable to you. But tell me this: Is it noble or generous to lead astray a young girl—a young wife—to put her in the power of a cold, scheming man of the world—hand *her* over to him—urge *him* on—all to punish the man who left her sister? Is this devoted or noble? I declare—and I don't set up to be squeamish—it seems to me devilish."

Greatly excited, Young Brett said, "If you mean this to apply to Miss Manuel, in her name I deny it altogether. I could not believe that you could mean



to utter such horrible slanders. I won't have them—I won't hear them, Major Carter, and—I must beg that this subject will not be pursued."

"With all my heart," said the other. "All I say is, watch for yourself when you go back. Take note of a Mr. Romaine and of Mrs. Fermor. Ask Miss Manuel herself. There."

"I shall!" Young Brett said, in great heat, "and within an hour after I arrive."

"Good," said the major. "I am content. We will say no more about it, as you desire it. Your warmth does you honour. Of course it is excusable in *her*: she loved her sister; but I implore of you reflect a moment before you go on. I have had troubles enough in my life, and want to end my days peaceably. Good God!" continued the major, walking up and down, "it is awful to think of. That any woman should venture on so terrible a track—and, my dear boy, I don't think you know the full force of what you are required to do."

Young Brett looked at him wondering, and still in distress. He had some qualms of conscience, and the picture of the old soldier buffeting wearily through life, and wishing to end his days in calm, affected him a little. He was almost on the point of speaking out candidly, and relieving the major's mind by telling him that all he had come down for was to hear something of "poor Mrs. Carter's" last illness, when he suddenly thought of Miss Manuel.

She was so wise, so superior, so good, that anything she ordered and ordained must be right. He rose hastily. "My dear major, this is a regular nightmare of yours. Have a glass of sherry."

Carter's face changed. A few people, on a few occasions in his life, had seen a strange fiendish contraction spread over that face. It came on this occasion. He stooped over. "Besides," he said, "you don't think of the *danger* there is in this sort of game. You won't take a friend's advice. No? I am sure you won't. You would be led by a bright, flashing woman—just as all boys are led. Now take a friendly warning, don't run your head against a stone wall. There are people in this world, my dear child, who, as the phrase runs, stick at nothing. They would crush, stamp on you, destroy you, to save themselves. You are a brave, good little fellow—rather foolish, though—and I should not like to see you in trouble. Take care, Master Brett, and, as a general rule through life, leave other people's business alone."

Young Brett laughed very good humouredly. Now that the major had dropped his character of the poor "buffeted" old officer, he was quite easy in his mind. "I am a stupid, foolish fellow," he said, "and they all tell me I want ballast. I am very young, you know, and shall mend, major. Are you staying in this house?"

Again the major's manner changed. He was

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the man of the world once more. "I have to go up by the night train. Lucky fellow! You will have a comfortable bed here, and a comfortable sleep. A capital house. I know it of old. Think of the poor traveller tumbling on the cushions, as you turn round on your side to go off into a comfortable snooze. You are not angry with me? Advice from a man of the world, and from an old man of the world, is always useful. Good-by."

## CHAPTER THE NINTH.

## YOUNG BRETT DISCOVERS ALL.

STILL under the impression that his office was a little "shabby," Young Brett had to reassure himself pretty often. All that Miss Manuel wished was to hear how a quiet lady died. He spoke to a waiter that night about Major Carter. An admirable gentleman, said the waiter, known and much liked in the place. They were all sorry when he left. He was so gay and cheerful, and could tell such nice stories. And Mrs. Carter? A good woman too, but "soft" and quiet—by no means to come near the major. What did she die of? O, ill for a long time; regular break up. Began with a cold. In fact, only for the major, who took such care and sat up and slaved himself night after night, she would have been dead months before. A good charitable man—gay and

pleasant too. (As if the charitable were not usually gifted with these qualities.) Where did he live, and the lady die? At Griffiths's, in the main street.

In the morning he saw the little dun town better, its tiny street, its house or two, whose second story projected over on pillars, and made a sort of summer-house below. He found that his hotel had one front which looked into the little main street, and another, heavy, massive, and of a chilling iron-grey, that made part of a terrace, and looked out across a little common upon the sea. This was now a cheerless prospect; and the iron-grey face was as rough and well scored with ill usage from the weather, as that of an old storm-beaten pilot.

He set off to Griffiths's. There were miniature shops, where they seemed to sell nothing but glass pickle-bottles full of sweets and lozenges, and in which articles a brisk trade must have been done. He found his way to a narrow yellow strip of a house, in the front bedroom of which Mrs. Carter had died. He knocked. It was opened by a tall bony woman. She stood with it half open, so that her figure, with the door, made up a perfect and satisfactory obstruction. Young Brett said cheerfully that he wished to see Mrs. Griffiths.

"About what?" said the other, sharply. "On what?"

“Well,” said Young Brett, “say about lodgings.”

“There are no lodgings to let here, nor won’t be,” said the woman, preparing to close the door.

“But,” said Young Brett, “I want to see Mrs. Griffiths.”

“Well, what o’ that?” said the woman, yet more sharply. “I am her; and I tell you we let no lodgings, and won’t let them.”

Brett, still good humoured and never to be put out of temper, said how provoking this was, and that it couldn’t be helped. That he was a stranger in the place, and could he—this he put at a venture—see Mr. Griffiths?”

“No you can’t—no, nor him neither,” she said, not so sharply now. “We don’t waste our time in this place, and you, young man, don’t waste yours.”

“You won’t let me in, that’s evident,” said Young Brett, laughing.

“What is it?” said a voice behind the woman, and a hard-lined face, that had been in the world some sixty years, appeared on the shoulder of the woman. Said the woman: “He wants lodgings. Only think! Why, there’s the hotel!”

The sixty years’ face had sharp eyes and ragged hair. The sharp eyes twinkled. “Lodgings,” it said. “Well, we might, you know. It ain’t our custom. But if a good thing offered——”

The bony woman turned on him. "Always for money," she said, wickedly. "You would sell your soul, and all our souls, for a tester. I tell you-we won't."

"You think money is to be picked up in the street," he said. "Here is a gentleman who will make us a good offer, I know he will. And it is hard, precious hard—in my own house, too."

"Ah, go in," she said, with a rough good humour. "Don't let us be exposing our fights in the street. It can't be done," she said to Brett. "Very sorry not to have you, sir. But we don't like to put ourselves out. And I have a hundred things to do; so——" She closed the door, making *it* finish what she was saying.

Young Brett went his way a little gloomy. "I can do no more," he thought, "if they *won't* let me in, or tell me anything." But he felt a little ashamed of coming back to Miss Manuel so unsuccessful. So he set off to take a walk in the grounds of the old castle next the town.

Some one "showed" it to him; *i.e.* received a shilling. And Brett was walking briskly about to warm himself, when he came suddenly on a woman with two children. He recollected the woman at once.

"O, sir," she said, "I came to look for you. I heard a gentleman had been at our house, and I was sure it was the same."

“What, at Griffiths’s?” said Young Brett. “And this is the little woman that nearly fell into the water? You must take care another time, little woman.” He doted on children, and most children that he met were seen “toddling” to him with their little hands extended. This little child of the red cloak he stooped down and kissed. The mother looked at him with beaming eyes. She was young and fresh, and had a soft interest in her face.

“O, indeed, sir,” she said, “we are so grateful to you. And you thought so little of it.”

“Nonsense,” said Young Brett, colouring, as he always did at praise. “You make me uncomfortable. So you were at Griffiths’s?”

“I am their daughter-in-law,” said she, “and live with them. My husband is dead. That little one there was his favourite.”

“Nice little woman!” Brett took her up, and put her on his shoulder. “What does she like? Go-carts and dolls, and Noah’s arks? I suppose they sell those sort of things somewhere?”

“O no, no, sir; you are too kind. But,” she went on, with some hesitation, “you wanted lodgings, you said.”

“Why—er—no, not exactly,” said Young Brett, setting the little girl down. “I wanted to—see somebody—or to hear something—you know—



more than the lodgings. Wasn't there a Mrs. Carter staying with you?"

The woman looked round with alarm. "Ah, I thought it was that," she said.

"Why?" said Young Brett, wondering.

"You wished to hear about *all* that. And I have been expecting it this long time back."

"Then I dare say *you* know all about it," said he, eagerly; "that is, if there is anything to know."

She shook her head. "Something—not much. It is a long story, and a sad story, and a curious story, sir. If you wish to learn it all, you should stay here some time, and see people who ought to be seen. You should take our lodgings."

Young Brett looked at her astonished. "This is all mysterious," he said. "I *did* want to take your lodgings, but they won't let me take them."

"O, they will," she said. "He will. He is moaning over the loss of so much money at this very moment. If you come again, sir, in the morning——"

"But," said he, "this is all so odd; and if I were to go to your house, I don't know—I ought to be back in London."

"Some one should look to it," the young woman said.

"It? What?" echoed Young Brett.

“*Her* illness,” said she, mysteriously. “It was very long, and very miserable, and——”

“How did she die?” said Young Brett, eagerly.

She shook her head. “I was kept away—shut out. Poor gentle lady, she fancied me a little, and someway *he* took care always not to let me near her. He suspected me.”

“Suspected!” said Young Brett, a little bewildered. “Suspected what?—and why should he suspect?”

The young woman shook her head and looked round. “*He* himself has been here, at our house. He knew that some one was coming, and told *them*. He has great influence with Mrs. Griffiths. But I say,” she went on, with greater vehemence, “some one should look after it! You should stay here some days. There are people to be seen that know a great deal. I can tell nothing, because I know but little; but you are clever, and can use your eyes and head.”

“Who am I to see?” said Young Brett.

They talked some time longer, and she told him—then went away.

There was a dingy apothecary’s shop there, languid as regards business; its bottles, medicines, and apparatus appearing under a delicate film of blue mould. The dispenser himself, as seen through a dusty pane, seemed to be suffering under the same powdery mite-eaten blight.

Young Brett walked into the shop briskly, and asked to see Doctor Jones. A boy came out from behind the dusty glass door of a back parlour, with hope in his face; but Young Brett, fresh, clean, and full of bright health, quickly dissipated all illusion. The boy's face fell. Doctor Jones appeared presently, a stooping, grey-haired, trembling old man, with a face of crushed and crumpled parchment. It was turned very shyly and suspiciously on the young officer. With his off-hand way, Young Brett said he wanted a box of cough lozenges. He did not say *for* a cough. Some such old friable fossils were discovered in a pigeon-hole and given to him. Then he began to talk pleasantly with the old man about the place, and about those who lived there.

There was a fire in the back parlour, and Doctor Jones, shivering a good deal, asked, "Would he come in and sit down?" Brett went in gladly, and had soon, with his old charm, recommended himself. Gradually he came to the subject that was in his mind, and cautiously mentioned the name of Major Carter.

The old man started back, and looked at him steadfastly, with his hands clasping the knobs of his chair. "Why do you mention *him*?" he said, quickly. "What do you want to know?"

"I?" said Young Brett. "I know him already

—have known him ever so long. I knew his wife, too, poor lady!”

Old Doctor Jones squeezed up his eyes to look yet more suspiciously at his visitor. “Why do you talk to *me* about her?” he said. “It is all so long ago: it is better to let the whole thing be forgotten. I don’t want to think of it. That is—if I was to be thinking of all the people I have attended, and what they suffered, what pleasant thoughts and pleasant dreams I should have!”

“So *you* attended Mrs. Carter?” said Young Brett, with blunt interest. “I want to hear about that illness. I am most anxious to know all about poor Mrs. Carter, and how she——”

Suddenly the dirty glass door was opened by a fresh, pink-looking, red-haired young man, with quick eyes, who stood with his hand on the door looking from one to the other. “Mrs. Carter’s illness!” he said. “Well, what about it? She was ill, and she died, and was buried, like a thousand other people. Who is this gentleman, father?”

Young Brett answered promptly that they were merely talking over the town and the people who had lived there.

“O!” said the young man, with a half smile; “that was all, was it? How singular! I am Doctor Watkyn Jones. I carry on the business. He is not able to go about and do the visiting. Father,

you had better go up-stairs ; there is a better fire there." He held the door with a quiet look that seemed to amount to an order. Trembling and looking on the ground with his parchment face, the old man tottered away. As soon as he was gone, the other sat down at the table, and began to talk with great frankness. "I know what this is about, sir," he said, "perfectly well. The insurance people had persons down here poking and prying about, trying to get up suspicions against honest folk. It is always their game. It is shameful! As far as I am concerned, I am determined they shall have no help ; nor from any one belonging to me. Every honest man must set his face against such proceedings."

He spoke this so warmly, that Young Brett felt with him. "I assure you," he said, "I have nothing to do with insurance people of any kind—never heard of them, in fact."

"I hope you did not understand me so?" said the other. "I have known Major Carter a long time. He is an honourable man, not rich, but wishing to do what is right and respectable. You will hear nothing but good of him in this place."

"Well, certainly," said Young Brett, "so far I have indeed——"

"But he has enemies," continued the other. "I know he has. There is one powerful family up in London whom he has offended, and who are lite-

rally hunting him, for some fancied injury that they think he did to them. I know, sir, on good authority, instances of this persecution that would amaze you!"

Young Brett, a little confused and guilty, felt himself colouring all over.

"I know this myself. This insurance business was all got up by them. The company were going to pay, and a lady of this family went to the manager, and put it all into their heads. Only conceive such a thing, sir!"

Young Brett was indeed a little shocked and ashamed. Miss Manuel's inquiries about the Irrefragable all flashed upon him.

"No, sir," said Doctor Watkyn Jones, confidentially drawing his chair closer, "you are a gentleman, and I shall make no secrets with *you*. When these insurance people came with their mean, sneaking, hole-and-corner inquiries, we met them openly, and sent them back to their London office without a scrap of information. If you care, I shall tell you the whole thing."

Young Brett said eagerly that he would like nothing so much; and for nearly two hours—during which time not a single patient disturbed them—Doctor Watkyn Jones told him the story of Mrs. Carter's happy end, without pain, and in perfect peace. On Young Brett it left an impression of a very touching scene, and completely.

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satisfied his honest heart. He had done the duty he had undertaken, and was delighted to find that it was to be a very small duty after all. Coming away light hearted, and with general esteem for the local practitioner, he gaily passed to his hotel, then wrote a long letter to Miss Manuel, and took an evening train across country to his regiment.

“I think,” he wrote, “it has all turned out very well, and I begin to think myself quite a clever diplomatist. Do you not feel for poor Mrs. Carter? She was a good creature, and I am glad to think died so happily and with such comforts round her. Old Carter, you see, is not so bad, and with more heart than we fancied.”

Young Brett, however, did not see the inconsistency between his earlier letters, describing what he had gathered from the young woman in the castle grounds, and his last. Miss Manuel did, and smiled to herself. “Poor honest boy!” she said; “he is too trusting and open to deal with people of this sort. I ought to have foreseen this from the beginning.”

## CHAPTER THE TENTH.

## MISS MANUEL ON THE TRACK.

SEEN in the Park, waiting on his Mrs. Wrigley, Major Carter's face seemed to have recovered its old clear brilliance. There was triumph in his eye. At last he was walking on the mosses of life, and he found it very grateful for his feet, a good deal blistered with stony travel. Things were going well with him. He had suffered friendly and complimentary delving in the ribs from cheerful acquaintances, together with the sly wink of encouragement, and the knowing, "*I see, Carter, my boy!*" Mrs. Wrigley's face, too, wore the fat bovine smile of conquest. At her time of life such victories are welcome. Punsher Hill and Hoblush found themselves drifting away farther and yet farther every day, and made desperate efforts. Major Carter, too,



had triumphed in another recent affair, and knew for certain that Young Brett's expedition had failed—failed hopelessly. It was indeed likely that, in a contest with a simple child, he should prevail. "Poor Miss Manuel!" he said, at the window of Mrs. Wrigley's ancient chariot, playing all his veteran coquetries, "she is recovering slowly, I hear; we shall not see her for weeks yet. Between ourselves, my dear Mrs. Wrigley, she tries too much—far too much. I don't like your manly women, ha, ha! No; when you are soft, and gentle, and feminine, and tender, and even helpless, my dear Mrs. Wrigley," and here the ancient chariot swung heavily with a sort of jerk, in acknowledgment of the compliment, "you make us your slaves." The voice of the major dropped suddenly into a low, sweet, and meaning key. From the chariot window full gelatine eyes swam and languished.

"Come and dine with me to-day," she said. "You must."

"Too happy," said the major, with grateful humility; "but may I ask a favour? Would you send Cards," he was fond of this old-fashioned expression, "to Hill and Hoblush?"

"Those odious clerical creatures!" said she, striving hard to recollect the mechanism of a "pout," but failing in the attempt. "How can you ask me, Major Carter?"

“Dear Mrs. Wrigley,” he said, “you don’t know how wicked the world is, and how envious some natures are. Oblige me in this, will you?”

And she did oblige him. There was a pleasant little meeting that night, when the two clergymen came, and the major was “delightful” and in spirits, and enjoyed Mrs. Wrigley’s old claret, which she knew he liked, and which she “spilled” profusely for him. After dinner, in the drawing-room, the major sat upon his chair, stirring his coffee, and profanely thought he was a sort of social Providence well able to control the little events and little worlds about him. And before that night was over, he—still holding his cup—had whispered some words to Mrs. Wrigley, which had suffused her bowl-shaped cheeks with the ghosts of ancient blushes, and she had lisped a faltering answer of delighted acquiescence.

But, at that very moment of success and happiness, there was another scene going on down at the little Welsh town, which, had he known of, would have turned the major’s well-trained cheeks quite pale.

Miss Manuel had decided on her course promptly. She took up the thread where good foolish Young Brett had dropped it. The gloomy brother wondered why she was getting her things together, and where she could be thinking of going at that rough season. He looked on suspiciously, and with roving

eyes. "You are getting tired of the work," he said. "In good time you will forget *her*."

Miss Manuel's face flushed up with an intelligent look. "Ah, Louis," she said, "how little you know me. I am living but for *that*. And it is for this, and this only, that I go upon this journey to-night." That strange, moody, and injured manner was growing more and more upon him, and he was only half satisfied.

She was to go with her maid, and on that night. All during her illness, Fermor had been at the door, restlessly coming to and fro. He was never allowed to enter. Day by day he had heard welcome news of her gradual mending. Soon he heard of her being out, and of her driving about, and came hurriedly. He found a cab at the door, and luggage was being placed on the top. What did this mean?

Miss Manuel met him on the steps. "What does this mean?" he repeated. "Going away! Why, you are not fit to travel."

He was struck by the change, and was almost pleased with himself for the romantic and quasi-paternal interest he was showing. She was gay, and in spirits, and laughed.

"What am I going for?" she said; "for a hundred reasons. Perhaps I want change of air—perhaps it is a mere whim—or perhaps I feel that I dare not trust myself here any longer, and that

a woman's resolution is growing weaker every day. Is not the only course to fly? Adieu!"

This speech, had it been written, would have thrown Fermor into a tumult of conceit. But as it was spoken, something scoffing underlaid it. He looked at her with doubt and trouble.

"Don't go," he said; "I want to speak to you. They would not let me in during your illness; and I came day after day. I saw others let in. You should not treat me in this way. Don't go yet; I have a thousand things to say to you."

Again Miss Manuel laughed. "A thousand things to say to me at a cab door! You should learn to be more practical in these days of railways. Good-by."

"But," he said, eagerly, "how long do you stay? Tell me—do. Where shall I write to——"

"Drive on," said she to the servant. "Everything is in, I believe." Then to Fermor: "Well, I believe a month, or six months—or perhaps only a week. It depends. Good-by."

Fermor stood looking after the cab. This strange treatment chafed him; yet there was something pleasing under all.

Early the next morning, a lady's maid in Beaumaris was asking at the mouldy dispensary where the maid's lady would be likely to find genteel and decent apartments by the week. A delicate lady,

newly recovered from sickness, who had been recommended bracing air. This was spoken to a boy behind the counter, who went in with the request to a back parlour, and came out again with an old man. The old man shaded his eyes with his hand, to look well at her.

"I don't know," he said, in a trembling voice. "My son Watkyn is away, and he would not like it, perhaps. Still, my dear, Watkyn likes a little money."

"But perhaps you know of some place?" said the lady's maid.

The boy said eagerly that their rooms were about the nicest in the place, and that the best quality came and stayed there. The maid then went away, and said she would report to her mistress.

Later in the day a delicate lady, whose face looked as if it could be very brilliant when in the full colour and flush of health, came into the shop, and the old man came out to her. He shaded his eyes as before, but looked longer and harder than before. Into that dusty powdery region she seemed to bring light, and fragrance, and brilliance. The boy stood helpless with his mouth open. The old man kept muttering, "Good gracious, good gracious!"

"They told me," said Pauline, in her sweet voice, "that you had rooms. If yours are not to let, you might, perhaps, know of others. There

would be an advantage, I confess, being only just recovered, in having medical assistance so near."

"Yes, yes," said the old man, hastily; "that is all true. Watkyn is considered clever all round the country, O, for miles. I am sure he would not mind; he ought to like it, indeed he ought. It would be a surprise for him when he comes back. Heaven send we may all die in our beds!" Which odd speech, muttered to himself in a reverie, made Miss Manuel and the boy start. He started himself, and looked round nervously.

The rooms were taken. Before the day was out it went through the town, where there was a perfect drought of news, that a "fine" lady had come down, and was staying at "th' old doctor's." Later, too, the fine lady was seen herself, walking about, in the green especially; and she spoke to the children playing there, and found out a little girl in a red cloak. For the little girl in the red cloak soon came a fresh and handsome young woman, and with the fresh and handsome young woman Miss Manuel began to talk.

The doctor's lodgings were clean and bright enough. They had a bow-window, and muslin curtains in the bow-window, and would have been very bright and encouraging apartments, but for a dreadful male portrait or two, done in rich tea-board colouring, which, clad in inflexible coats,

with high collars apparently cut out of the hardest wood, and suggesting horrible associations of discomfort for the wearer, looked down with a mournful ferocity on the tenants as they sat at tea.

That night the doctor's son came home, and started as he saw a great box of Miss Manuel's in the hall. She heard his voice below, putting all manner of inquiries, half angrily, half suspiciously. Very soon he was up in the drawing-room, on the pretext of seeing that all was comfortable.

This pink Welshman, so free of speech, talked gaily with Miss Manuel, who presently set him quite at ease. One of her charms, which she could assume when she pleased, was a helplessness of manner, with a sense of finding strength and support in the person she was talking with. He was at first half curious, hinting as to where she came from, and how long was she going to stay, and why, of all places in the world, she selected that cold bleak corner to repair her health in. Pauline scorned a falsehood, or even a semblance of one; but someway a misty idea was left upon his mind that some one, say some visitor, had spoken of the superior medical advice to be found in the little town. He told her by-and-by all about himself, for she showed great interest in such personal details; how his practice was increasing, how he soon expected to have the whole business of the

place, and of the country round. He was making great way.

Said Miss Manuel, quickly: "And you have not long succeeded your father? He was practising last year, was he not?"

The other looked at her suspiciously. "Well, yes," he said. "But how did you know? *That* news did not fly up to London."

"O, I have heard a good deal since I came—even already," said Miss Manuel, smiling; but he had become doubtful and silent, and as he left the room, cast back a sharp quick searching look at her.

During these days Miss Manuel often went up and down, often went in and out, often looked wistfully at the glass door; but the son was always on quick sharp duty. She never saw that strange nervous old man who sat in the parlour over the fire—that is, could not see him alone, for when she met him, and tried to talk to him, the son stood by and watched jealously with his eye fixed on him. Under which eye old Doctor Jones always grew uneasy.



CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH.

A STORMY NIGHT.

IT went on, in this fashion, for a week—then for ten days—then for a fortnight. It was a jail-like existence. The lady who visited the watering-place out of the season, and at a cheerless season out of the season, was an inexhaustible source of wonder and speculation to the inhabitants. The town maid, cut off from her circle of friends and acquaintances (when *her* season, too, was rife), began to murmur at heart, to grow reserved, and, later, became charged with lemons and vinegar about her face. Pauline herself was fretting and growing impatient. At last, on the night of a cold miserable day, whose tone had been blue as steel, the sea tumbling sharply and bitterly up the straits, and sharp icy east winds gashing at human chests

and human eyes like cruel razors, an express came in from a neighbouring squire for young Doctor Watkyn Jones. Doctor Watkyn Jones's stories to Miss Manuel were, indeed, pure fables; he was not often sent for, and a Welshman of grim humour said his patients were all of the "God reward ye" class. The express from the squire was for the squire's lady—the great country doctor was away, and Watkyn was the nearest medical man. With the squire's express came a gig to take away Watkyn Jones.

At first he was dazzled and triumphant, and rushed to tell the London maid, who had been scornfully indifferent to him as an admirer, and who doubted his professional standing. "He was an imposture," she often said to Miss Manuel (thinking she was using the word "impostor"). Then his pink face became overcast. But it was late, ten o'clock, and he asked the London maid had her mistress gone to bed? The London maid, with a toss of her head, said she would be in bed in ten minutes. The triumph of the moment soon shut out every other thought, and he took his place in the gig with pride. "Go to bed, father," he said, sternly, fixing him with his eye; "you sit up too late. It is not good for you. If I had a moment, I should see you in bed before I left."

"Indeed I will," said the old man. "But what a night for me to be left alone. Do you hear the

wind? Lord have mercy on us! That we may all die in our beds!"

The son did not wait to hear the last of this speech, but grumbled as he took his place in the gig. "He does not think of *me* out here," he said. The razors were indeed darting about wildly. Miss Manuel up in her room, and just about going to bed, heard the gig wheels' and the voices below, and the news of Squire Morgan's wife being ill. She heard, too, the winds growling up the straits sulkily and sourly, as if they were coming up a tunnel. The London maid came in and told her all the details—with great zest, too, for she had now, like other prisoners, began to take interest in things like social prison spiders or Picciolas. Her mistress listened eagerly.

"Is it far away?" she asked.

"O," the maid answered, "he will be away the whole night."

"I shan't go to bed yet," said Miss Manuel. "Don't wait up."

It was an old house, built when the little dun town was struggling out of being a mere village. The wooden bow-window rattled, as if the wind wanted to get in, and was in a fury at being kept waiting. Every one was keeping close, even to the old watchman who managed the "curfew"—for they had their curfew in the dun town—and he was snugly sitting in the public-house. Miss

Mantiel, wrapping a shawl about her, came down stairs, and saw a light through the glass door of the parlour. She opened it softly.

The old man was looking nervously at the clattering windows, shrinking away from each gust. He did not hear or see Miss Manuel's entrance. He was saying to himself, in his old formula, "Lord have mercy on us! That we may all die in our beds!" when he looked round suddenly and saw his visitor—that is, a tall flashing woman with a light in her hand—a spirit, surely, or an angel. For a moment he was terror-struck. Miss Manuel began to speak cheerfully to him and with encouragement. But he was scarcely to be reassured.

"What a night!" said she. "It makes one feel quite uncomfortable."

"Ay! what a night," he said. "God Almighty be with us."

"Not a night," said she, "to be sitting alone. We want company, and not to be left to our own thoughts."

"No, indeed," said the old man, looking at her strangely, "and it was odd, wasn't it, that *he* should have been sent for to-night, when—when——"

"When we would like the house to have all its tenants. Yes," she said, "it *is* odd. Yet it has happened fortunately for me. I wished to speak to you."

“To me!” said the other, starting up. “Why to me? What do you want to know?”

Miss Manuel smiled. “How odd, now!” she said. “I never said I wished to know anything. That would be accepted as suspicious elsewhere.”

“Suspicious! Who is talking of suspicion?” said the old man, now very agitated.

She fixed her eyes on him. “Why,” said she, suddenly—“why is it that your son always watches you so?”

“Watches me? No—he does not.”

“Yes he does,” said she, quickly. “I have remarked it. It seems as if *you* had some secret which he was afraid you would disclose.”

The look of stupid wonder and confusion the old man gave her, she recollected long afterwards. He could not answer.

“Another question,” said Miss Manuel. “Good gracious! what a gale. Did you feel the house rock then? What is the reason that you are always talking of dying in our beds? I have heard you say so many times.”

He looked at her now quite scared. “Why do you come to me in this way,” he said, tossing his hands, “when there is no one in the house? When he is away? And on such a night, Lord deliver us! What do you want? You have some dreadful thing in your mind. And—I have said nothing and done nothing.”

She soothed him. "Don't be alarmed," she said. "I am very solitary up-stairs. The wind always frightens me. No wonder I should like a little company. You talk of dying in our beds, but think of any poor soul departing on such a night as this—rushing from the world in a storm! Are there any now in Beaumaris, I wonder? I passed a house this very day where there was a lady dying not so very long ago. Griffiths's they told me it was called."

The old man was now standing up. "My son was right," he said; "he told me so. He warned me. He knew it. Ah! you have watched for this opportunity. You have got me here alone and helpless. It is unfair; it is——"

"Hush! hush!" said Pauline, drawing herself up. "You will betray yourself. Suppose that I have? Suppose I have come down to seek and to discover and to bring the guilty to justice—to track out a foul crime? Suppose I *have* watched for, and found an opportunity? Suppose I *have* found you here alone and helpless, as you say; you may bless your stars for it! For it is the only chance that offers to save you from what you dread, and from what I can see is preying on your soul and on your conscience. And that chance is—I tell you openly and plainly—confession!"

He was speechless with terror and astonishment.

“Take care, take care,” she went on, quickly. “You don’t know what is hanging over you. The net is drawing closer every day. There is danger and ruin coming, and coming fast. You can save yourself by helping me. I know more than you think I know. Do you refuse or hesitate? If you dare to tell your son when he returns, I shall go away at once, and let everything take its course. Shall I go now?”

She took up her light, and stayed a moment with her hand on the door.

At last he found speech. “But I have done nothing. I know nothing. I am so old. I have——”

“No, no,” said she, coming back with a reassuring smile. “Who thinks so? No one. But still you know much, and know much that you can tell. Shall I sit down, or——” And again she laid her hand on the candle.

“But—but—my son—my son,” said he, shaking his hands despairingly; “what will *he* say?”

“What will he say when I go away—when the whole becomes public—when you are both dragged away as accomplices—when this town, and this principality, and this kingdom are ringing with the news of the cruel business that was done down here?”

“Who are you?” he said, full of terror. “What do you want with me? I am a poor miserable old man, and must die soon. It is cruel. I have no strength. My son would protect me if he were here. I am a miserable creature that would not hurt a fly, and must die soon.”

Pauline started up, and stood before him like a destroying angel. “You *are* old,” she said, “and miserable, and have the long, long days of a long life to count up. You must die soon. Yes, but how? There are other ways than that dying in your bed you are so anxious for. For all your years and all your misery, you may yet be dragged to a shameful end. He who looks on is as guilty as he who does the work.”

The old doctor shrank away from her, and tried to hide himself behind his hands. “Don’t, don’t speak so awfully,” he said, trembling. “I am an old miserable creature who would harm no one.”

Pauline looked down on him for a moment. “Very well,” she said. “Be miserable, then; I have done. On your own head be it. Do as you like: and I leave you now——”

She turned to go. At that moment the wind came with a fresh howl and a fresh fury down the street: there was a crash only a few houses away, as of a chimney hurled down into ruins. Then



came silence; and the old man crouched and cowered into his arm-chair, as if it were a cave where he could hide his head. She had her hand on the door, and it opened noisily.

“Don’t—don’t leave me,” he said, piteously. “I shall be destroyed if I am left alone. There, I will tell you all—that is, all I know.”

## CHAPTER THE TWELFTH.

## FOREBODINGS.

MISS MANUEL had returned. She had been at Torquay, or at St. Leonard's, or at some of those sheltered winter corners where invalids go to find colour and strength. This her world supposed ; her court of writers and "clergymanical" reviewers, all knew this ; and when they made their congratulations on her return, never suspected that her fresh brilliancy was owing to the keen breezes of the little dun town so far away. She returned with all the enthusiasm of triumph.

Almost on the day of her arrival she met Major Carter. He had heard of her visit. He had fallen in with Fermor, who, in a pettish way, had told of her sudden departure. "She is gone, God knows where, and has told nobody." Which speech dis-

turbed the major not a little. Now, as she passed him to enter a shop, there was a look of insolent victory in her face, which made him yet more uneasy, and sent him home thoughtful. If he had only watched her carefully for the rest of the day, he would not have slept that night.

For early that morning Mr. Speedy had received a fairy-looking note at his Irrefragable office, and was almost intoxicated at finding in it a request that he would, after office hours, wait on Miss Manuel at her house. From that day he became generally superior to homely Mrs. Speedy. The note was long preserved in the Speedy archives, and it lay for many a day on the top of the other notes in the little basket. Major Carter was not passing, or he would have seen Mr. Speedy, with a new pair of gloves, going in; and Major Carter was not Asmodeus Carter, or he would have frantically torn away the front of *that* house, of all houses in London, to see and hear Miss Manuel and the man of business sitting close, and talking with extraordinary eagerness. Major Carter did not watch the terminus at Euston-square for the night-train to start, or he would have seen a muffled Mr. Speedy drive up and take a ticket for Bangor, on "special mission," as it was said at the office, where he was missed next day. On this "special mission," sent by order of the directors, he was away more than a week. Thus over the

head of unsuspecting Major Carter was already hanging a spectral sword of Damocles, and as it swung and shook, he felt himself brought within its cold shadow, and shivered; but the world was going so pleasantly with him, that he shook off all disagreeable thoughts for the present.

Mrs. Fermor, full of enthusiasm and young affection, had soon shut out the memory of what she had heard during her night-watch, and came eagerly to welcome her friend back again. She had worked herself into a sort of romantic love for this friend; and though she felt again, when ascending the stairs, something of her old recollections, when she entered and saw Miss Manuel sitting nearly as "bright" as ever, she forgot it, and ran forward to embrace her with real affection.

"I am so glad, so delighted, to see you down again," she said, with a sort of punctuation, as it were, of kissing.

Pauline tried to be cold, but her resolution gave way before the genuine delight of this faithful little woman. Then she turned from her suddenly and sharply, and she called herself (mentally) "She-Judas!"

"I am so glad!" said Mrs. Fermor. "I never discovered until you were ill how much I liked you. I don't know why; we have known each other for so short a time; and I dare say," she added, a little ruefully, for she again thought of what she had heard during the night-watching,

“you do not care so much for me?” And she looked at her wistfully.

“Why should you think that?” said Pauline. “You know I like you, and *indeed* I feel grateful for all you have done for me. I only learnt to-day how you nursed and watched me. And it has distressed me more than you would suppose. I wanted nobody,” and she added, a little vehemently, “and you—not for the world. You might have caught it. But I am indeed grateful.” And again she turned sharply, and called herself Judas. “I never thank,” she went on earnestly. “They tell me I am cold, and do not feel obligations. So that you will understand—if I should ever appear not to value what you have done as it deserves to be valued, you will set it down to the right cause. Don’t judge me too harshly; there may be more behind than you know of. We may not all have our free will.”

Deeply mystified at the beseeching manner with which this was said, Mrs. Fermor knew not what to make of it. “I don’t know,” she said, “but I am sure you will be always kind and good.” She added, piteously, “I seem to have no friends now. I have so few to care for me, and those few——” She stopped.

“But your husband,” said Miss Manuel, “is not he all in all, as they put it?”

The little lady’s little brow contracted. Her eyes fell towards the ground. “I dare say it is

my fault," she said. "It may be. I am very young and foolish. Perhaps if I had some one to advise and counsel me, some kind person that understands me, or would try and understand me. I thought of this very often during the night that I was with you. From the very first day I was attracted to you—I felt that *you* would aid and assist me in some difficulty. And now I am sure, if I were to put confidence in you and tell you my little troubles, you, who I *think* are beginning to like me—you who are so good and noble——"

Miss Manuel, who had been listening with eyes fixed on the other, turned hastily and rose. "No, no," she said, "not to me. To any one in the world but me. I am not fit to advise any one. Good and noble! No, no. Wicked, rather! I have no will, no strength. I am a weak, miserable being. Leave me, leave me quick! I am ill still, I believe, and talk absurdly. Leave me now. I shall be better to-morrow."

Mrs. Fermor departed, sad and wondering. When she was gone, Pauline fell upon and buried her face in the cushions of a sofa, sobbing wildly. "Good God! good God! what am I coming to? What devilish task is this I have plunged into? Destroying the innocent—poisoning the pure! No, no—save me, save me; and spare that poor, gentle, tender, confiding thing!"

She felt a hand upon her shoulder, and she started up. "Whom would you spare?" said her brother, scornfully; "that girl who has just left you? Never, by my soul! never! not while I live! If your hand fails, then is mine ready—far rougher, and far more deadly. So choose. I am growing impatient. It is too long. Ah, Pauline! you treat an oath lightly. Your memory is growing weak. To me it seems but last night, and that our darling Violet is lying in the next room. Come, take a serious warning, or, as sure as I live, I go out into the open roads and make shorter work of it. I shall, surely as I live!" He then looked round and round the room with a suspicious glare, as if some one was concealed. "How can you want me to tell you of these things? *I* want no promptings. My heart carries me on only too fast. *You* are forgetting, and will soon have forgotten. I never *can* forget. I saw her last night——" He stopped, looking round wildly.

She was frightened, and soothed him. "Now, Louis," she said, "depend on me. Leave all to me. *Indeed* I have not forgotten, and never, never shall." Those words of his often repeated themselves; but latterly she had noticed they grew more intense, and lasted longer.

"No," she said, "I must go on. He is right. The guilty still flourish, and shall be overtaken."

## CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH.

## LADY LAURA STILL WORKING.

THE glowing cheek and rich red lip for which Mrs. Fermor was noted, were paling off into lighter tones. A wrung and wistful look was in her bright eyes. In her little soul, a stiff strong stubborn pride was working. It had worked its way, like a strong current through the earth of an embankment; and the "breach," as it would be called, between her and her "lord," was widening with every fresh day.

She went out a good deal into "society," where, like many wandering married ladies, whose lords do not choose to wander with them, she found plenty of pleasant friends and strangers to chatter with, and even—to use the good-natured word which conveniently cloaks up so many derelictions—even to "flirt" with. Had a friendly lady on an



ottoman close by introduced that word to her, she would have coloured up, and gathered in the folds of her dress with noisy rustle, and indignantly played the respectable young woman outraged. With *her* it was all homage, and *intellectual* talk with *clever* men—the old moral spring-guns and “gins” of fatal power and mischief. Mrs. Fermor, therefore, was seen at many parties, and the observant remarked that “that Mr. Romaine” was at nearly all the houses where Mrs. Fermor was seen.

There was an intimate air in his manner, the observant observed, which she herself was conscious of, and struggled against. He had the look of coming with her there, and of taking her away, though in effect he did neither. He saw her down to halls, and there imperiously took her cloak from another holding it for her to put on. And though he did not go near her much in rooms, she had a feeling that she was always under his eyes. She began to feel, indeed, that this must not go further, and had determined that, as soon as the holy work in his regard she had put her hand to was satisfactorily accomplished, it *should* cease. Poor quick, vivacious, little soul! impetuous, aggrieved, with a sore heart under her tulle, she was kept up by her pride. That “holy work” she had undertaken was pretty near to being accomplished. It was said that Mrs. Massinger’s marriage had made no such

brilliant impression as was reckoned on (one of her professional critics said she was "curdy"), and the Town resented it as if it were her fault. The noble earl who looked to those matters, and "rated" *belles* as seamen are rated, before and after the mast, had smiled contemptuously as he looked down on her through his gold "pinchnose," as the French call it. "Blancmange, my good Fitzroy," he said, shutting up his "pinchnose." "Blancmange, and no more. There are people, of course, who *like* blancmange."

The neophyte was behaving valiantly. It did seem as though he would be firm in his faith. But already the Fiery Cross of Scandal had been softly passed round by the full fat fingers of dowagers, and the irrevocable "coupling" of her name with that of Mr. Romaine had taken place. Poor foolish, little, innocent, helpless married woman! The turbaned vultures were already fluttering heavily in the air overhead.

Fermor, the "fallen-short man"—*homme manqué*—was still wrapped in his moodiness as in a cloak. There was bitterness in everything he chewed. Presently, a good-natured elderly man, with grey whiskers and a gold double eye-glass, with a ribbon and *square* glasses, came up to him confidentially one evening, and laying the gold glasses on Fermor's shirt, said: "My dear fellow, I know you are a man of sense, and will not take ill what

is said by a man old enough to be your father—  
but—er—I want to speak—about” (cough) “Mrs.  
—er—Fermor.”

Fermor looked at him sharply, and grew hot.  
“What would you say about Mrs. Fermor?”

“Well,” said the other, “it is merely as a friend,  
you know, and——”

“O, of course,” said the other, bitterly, “it is  
always a friend who brings us good news. Well?”

“You see, the world,” said the other, stretching  
out his glass in the direction of the world, but  
being brought up suddenly by the shortness of the  
ribbon, “you see, the world, my dear fellow, is  
ensorious, and I *do* think, if you went a *little*  
more out with Mrs. Fermor, especially to those  
parties which that half-savage fellow Romaine fre-  
quents——”

This came as news indeed for Fermor. “This,  
then, is the game?” he thought. “I am to be  
ridiculous through Town; the mari complaisant;  
the easy-tempered jackass. Let her treat me as  
she pleases at home, but I will not be pointed at.”

To the next party, Captain Fermor announced  
sullenly that he was going. “With all my heart,”  
said Mrs. Fermor, gaily. “I hope you will go to  
others too.”

Fermor laughed scornfully. “We shall see.”

Lady Laura was still fighting the fashionable

“good fight.” She was labouring on with her old constancy, and seemed to have gained fresh spirit, though not fresh strength. The face was growing yet longer; the worn cheeks yet more worn; but the eye had the old keen wary ken, and swept the line of men with the nicest appreciation, like a general’s. Yet there were many things to damp and discourage her.

Though successful with Alicia Mary, whom, with infinite pains and struggling, she had made Mrs. Onslow Piper, still that alliance had brought with it serious charges, and some terrible expenses. Trousseau and breakfast were the least of these; but at the last moment young Piper, with an aggrieved manner, as though he were making this proposal a *test* for whether he had been “taken in” or no, “struck,” and bluntly and suspiciously said it was due to his self-respect to “get something;” that his friends said it was “a shame.” And though the poor lady-captain did what she could, the odds were too great, and she had to wring out of her own allowance something that would satisfy the greedy youth. There was the London house too, and the London carriage, and London riding horses on job, and the London milliner, Madame Adelaide: but months ago the job-master had talked to Lady Laura in her own hall as if she had been one of his stable-boys; and Madame Adelaide, once sweet and full of lively compli-

ments, was now showing her teeth, and snarling about "her attorney." Yet she fought on, laboured on, for there was hope. Blanche, younger and fresher than Alicia Mary, had somehow been attracting that young Lord Spendlesham, just burst from his guardians, and who, in truth, fancied Blanche. Actually "the thing" was making progress, and Blanche, wearing always a look of devout adoration, and following the noble youth with steady eyes wherever he moved, conveyed the idea of a hopeless idolatry not unpleasing. Lady Laura had friends—good faithful contemporaries—who gave the boy a smile of encouragement, and remarked to him the "fine girl there" who never took her eyes off him.

Young Spendlesham — unconsciously selfish — threw out carelessly many whims and wishes, which were gratified at great cost to the family. He was passionately fond of dancing, and when there was a gap in his programme, outside he would say to Blanche, "Get Lady Lau to give a dance. *I dote on dancing.*" And Lady Lau bowed her head with Spartan courage, and was abroad for one half the day in a cab, and for the other half in her room doing common millinery-work with desperate but skilful fingers, striving hard to avoid drifting away on the rocks of Madame Adelaide. Whence she wrung out money for these works, and how she faced the rude job-master and the

insolent Frenchwoman, and with dignity made them (for the time) ashamed, and how she screwed a little delay out of both job-master and milliner, were things to be admired and compassionated. "If I had only time to breathe," she thought often, "and a little space in front clear! But they come on me all together, and from all sides."

"Ask the Fermors," she said to her daughter. "I hate having aggrieved relations going about."

And this was the party to which Fermor had said so sullenly that he would go.

## CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH.

## A CLOUD NO BIGGER THAN A HAND.

WHILE Miss Manuel was away, the town had something to talk of. It was soon pretty well known and pretty well talked about, how "that sucking young Spendlesham" was about to make "a greater fool of himself" than ever. His own contemporaries told him, in their friendly way, "not to be an ass," and seriously wondered among themselves what he could see in so plain a virgin, who was almost old enough to be his mother. But among the long tribe of dowagers the attempt was most deeply resented. Had they got her among them in some private place, they would surely have sacrificed her. The fury of this elderly populace knew no bounds, and they almost thirsted for her blood.

It was wonderful indeed. Alicia Mary had been difficult to "placer;" but her incomparable mother had brought her in a winner, as the skilful jockey does the indifferent horse, simply by splendid riding. But what was difficult with Alicia Mary seemed almost impossible with Blanche, who was raw, helpless, and without any fertility of resource. "Splendid riding" was here profitless; but Fortune took pity on this gallant Lady Laura, and, by some combination of accidents, fascinated the young Spendlesham with the charms of Blanche. The "finest woman" he had ever known was a fresh barmaid at a fishing inn in the country, for whom he had had an agonising attachment. But the barmaid had long since married respectably—*i.e.* into an opulent butcher interest. The features of Blanche recalled the old romance, and the fresh barmaid seemed to live again in the person of Blanche.

But young Spendlesham was not yet *sui juris*. The law had furnished him with some odious janissaries called guardians, who were wary and watchful. One of these was happily an old admirer of Lady Laura's, Sir John Westende, of Westende House, who, as young Sir John, clapped and applauded when she, as young Lady Laura, was flying round in tulle and flowers on her bare-backed steed. These were the delightful days when we had "figure," and a "neck," and colour, and light



in our eyes, and all the ambrosial charms of youth. Sir John, it was thought, was sure to "come forward;" but he was irresolute, and went back again timidly when he had advanced.

The young Sir John of those days had not the Westende property, which came in late. He had a modest but sufficient patrimony, and was deeply in love with Lady Laura. The latter, if ever she liked any man, might be said to have liked Sir John, and told him so. But sentiment, with her, could only be indulged in where it was to be had gratis; any laying out of money on it was out of the question. Young Sir John went away happy, to travel for two months, and when he returned found that a personal friend had been invited to take his place; a personal friend, too, whose prospects were, if anything, only a shade better than his own. The skilful who managed her affairs thought they were bound to give her the benefit of ever so trifling an advantage; and, considering that the Westende property had not then come in (it eventually "came in" by an aunt), it was only natural that they should act as they did. The balance, which took the shape of sentiment, could not be reduced into moneys numbered; and was, of course, left out of the reckoning. Sir John was put back; the friend, who was shy and retiring, received notice that it was now *his* turn. This caused a breach. Young

Sir John, after some excited expostulation, retired to Westende, while Lady Laura married Mr. Fermor.

On this step he was furious, got a severe illness, recovered, and went away to the Continent. By-and-by the aunt died, and the Westende property "came in" unexpectedly. The news gave a dreadful pang to Lady Laura; and later Sir John married handsomely. The lady he married was the well-known Miss Chedder, of the banker's family, with, as some of the elder ladies put it, "sixty thousand pounds to her back, my dear," but who had also sixty thousand tongues. She was a stalwart lady, and brought with her to the family the whole story of the Fermor affair, which she kept alive and fresh by constant daily allusion, rubbing salt into an old sore. For sixteen years Sir John led a miserable life, with the Lady Laura business flourished in his face, hurled at his back as he left the room, tumbled about his ears like broken crockery, dashed on his cheeks like hot scalding tea—until the famous Miss Chedder died, and left him a widower, with two good-looking daughters.

Young Sir John by-and-by thus became a fatherly Sir John, later on a middle-aged Sir John, and was now a fresh and elderly Sir John. But he had never forgiven the Fermors. He had grey whiskers and a round clean face, with a

light-blue tie and white waistcoat. For him was the handsome carriage with the bays seen waiting at the foot of the steps as the train halted at Westende; and to him porters and station-master at Westende obsequiously touched their caps. Then, as the train passed over the viaduct, its passengers saw the bright carriage and brighter horses below, rolling along the winding road, dipping into the clumps of trees, and reappearing in the sun, making the mile and a half or so of journey which lay between Westende House and the station.

Sir John's sister had married a brother of the late Lord Spendlesham, so that it was quite fitting that he should be appointed one of the guardians. Sir John himself having the two good-looking daughters, it was natural that he should begin to associate his ward and his daughters together, in a tranquil and prospective manner. Though he always said that his ward was not worth his salt, and had no wit, and never would have any, and the sooner he made a fool of himself the better.

This at least was his tone until suddenly, one day, a co-guardian came down to the station and took the pleasant road that led to the park, specially to communicate the news that young Spendlesham had announced that he was going to marry on the very day he came of age. Sir John,

who was in his garden with his blue tie on and a grey "wide-awake" hat, took this news savagely—his face grew pink with rage and excitement, and he threw down his stick upon the gravel walk. "It shan't be! By —— it shan't be!" he said; "curse their impudence." (Sir John swore on great occasions.) "What do they mean? They have done this on purpose. That woman has laid it all out; I know her."

For an hour he was in a fury, then ordered his carriage, and drove into the country town, six miles off, to see Padgett, the country attorney and coal agent. Having seen Padgett, he posted up to London and saw his ward. He came in on him very hot, and very incoherent. The boy wrapped an imaginary toga about him, and drew himself up to meet the storm. "I don't believe it," said Sir John, injudiciously, "not a word of it. They have been making a fool of you, sir. I wonder you have not more sense. You must be watched like a child in the nursery. Pack up your things, and come down with me to the country. I'll expose these people."

"Never!" said the young lord, still in his toga; "my word is pledged—the word of a peer."

"The word of a noodle," roared Sir John. "Don't spout in that fashion to me! Ah! I am ashamed of you. An old stale bit of crust like that,

that has been kicking about the ball-rooms for years."

"It's a shame to speak of a lady in that way," said the youth. "She loves me. I shall be of age in a few months, and can do as I like."

With this tone in the discussion, of course no progress was made. Sir John went away foaming, and determined to expose "those people."

He was at a dinner-party that night, and, after the dinner-party, "went on" moodily to some "rout." There he saw Miss Manuel, who had always a regard for "oldish" men. She was always thus protesting against the cold and Pagan system of modern manners, which carries out the aged of the tribe and exposes them, as they get helpless, on mountains, with a pot of rice. She always fought the battle of the old, and said how grateful they were for any consideration, and how anxious to fit themselves to the times that had left them behind, if the world would only let them. This night she was flushed with victory, having just returned from her Welsh expedition.

Sir John told her his troubles, working himself into a perfect heat as he did so. "They are a mere set of adventurers these Fermors," he said, "that should be exposed. I don't see why I should be keeping them up. They have always treated me scurvily, from the father downwards. I was very near being taken in myself by that scheming

woman. She did her best to catch me, but I had wit enough to escape her." (It was so long ago, Sir John might safely give out this new version.) "She was a fine woman then, and I had a raging school-boy's fancy for her; and, ma'am, behaved nobly—nobly, as it seems to me now—when she found she could not get me, and took up with that stupid blundering Fermor. I could have broken the thing off in ten seconds; but I didn't. I said nothing; no, not a word, and they were married."

Sir John had worked himself into a perfect heat as he thought of his treatment.

Miss Manuel listened eagerly, and then said suddenly, "But I never heard. Do tell me, Sir John."

But Sir John had repented on the spot. It was so long ago, he said; it was a mere story of the day, and he wasn't sure that it *was* a story at all. "Look at their ingratitude," he went on, in a fresh burst; "that poor devil, Pocock, who has helped them through many a business, they will do nothing for him—nothing whatever."

"It is very hard," said Miss Manuel; "you know they are not friends of mine. It *is* no harm to say that we have cause to regret an acquaintance with *that* family. I am told it is not considered a very serious thing now, and that the young men of the day mean it for mere amusement. But still, I cannot bring myself to know Lady Laura, or to like her."

The allusion to Sir Hopkins made a deep impression on Miss Manuel. She almost despised that restless, plotting spirit, and could scarcely bring herself to think him of sufficient dignity to be the object even of punishment. She had avoided him almost with contempt. Now she sought him. She was struck by the decay and blight that had settled on his face. "You have quite given me up, Sir Hopkins," she said to him. "There was a time when you used to come and see me, and talk about your travels, and the treaties, and wild natives. Come and see me to-morrow."

The old intriguer, whose diplomatic heart was made sick to death by hope deferred, and who had furrows of sickly fretfulness and anxiety marked on his cheeks, was glad to have an opportunity to air his grievances—and came.

His hair was scattered and thin. "It is the way of the world," he said, nervously (he was only now finding out that way of the world)—"always the way they use you when they don't want you." (But had it not been Sir Hopkins's own way to the world?) "I am sure a man who had composed those Waipiti troubles would have a claim. Why, old Lord Boldero said to me, only this day, 'No fellow like you, Pocock, for handling the natives!' His very words, Miss Manuel! And that young conceited Harding Hanaper, who can sit in an office easily enough, and give pert answers easily

enough too, he tells me that he is afraid nothing can be done for me."

"But," said Miss Manuel, gently, "you should get your friends to work for you—the Fermors, for instance."

"The Fermors!" said Sir Hopkins; "I would die sooner than ask them for anything. You don't know all I have done for those people—the sacrifices, the trouble—and I have asked them to use some little interest (and they can work the Bury-shaft influence well), and they refused. You don't know what obligations they are under to me."

"It is very hard," said Miss Manuel.

"Hard, it is monstrous!" he said, piteously. "They talk of being old! Look at Boldero, he is ten years older than I am, but they sent *him* out. Of course they did. He has married into the office, and they will do any job for him. But it is always the way—and the way of the world."

It was pitiable to hear this worldling so severe on the world he had loved and served. As Miss Manuel looked at him, she wondered at the change that had come on him. He seemed to have grown old and almost drivelling. A year or two of chafing and importunity and anxiety had brought this all about. He was no longer the pleasant Sir Hopkins, who gave dinners and who ate them, and who went along the highways of life in listen shoes. No wonder the young flippant children of F. O. said he had quite "broken up." "I don't speak



to the Fermors now," he went on. "All I asked her was to go to the old duke, who used to admire her so long ago. He couldn't refuse. I *know* he couldn't. There is a history about that. Then I said, a letter, a few lines. She wants to nurse her interest for her family. Carter, too, who did dirty work enough for the family—they have treated him just the same."

Miss Manuel's eyes flashed. "Dirty work, indeed," she said; "but he will find his account. As they all will."

Sir Hopkins looked a little confused. "I meant," he said, "that old business, long ago. As for Eastport, I give you my word of honour, Miss Manuel——"

"I have heard of that old affair," said she, eagerly; "but never the details."

"O, it's an old story," he said, "forgotten now. I mean *their* ingratitude; is it not very bad?"

Said Miss Manuel, suddenly: "I have some little influence in the direction you speak of. An official friend told me lately that he could help a friend of mine, in a small way; that is, I could speak to him, you know."

"*Could* you! O, *could* you!" said Sir Hopkins, in the fervour of senile gratitude. "How kind, how good, how generous! O, Miss Manuel, I shall never forget it; never, never! Anything, you know, will do."

"It is difficult," she said; "but I can promise it to you. There was an island—Prince Somebody's, I think."

"Yes, yes. Lee Boo's. How did you know?" he said, in astonishment.

"I know many things," said Pauline; "more than ever a diplomatist would suppose; and I am curious to know more. I have a woman's taste for gossip, Sir Hopkins. Sit down there, and tell me your little bit of ugly family business—to amuse me."

Instantly he became the old sly-looking Sir Hopkins, and glanced at her sideways, as he would have done long ago at a Waipiti trying to take him in. "I am not to be entrapped or seduced," he seemed to say. What he did say was, "O, it is a stupid old story, Miss Manuel; would not interest you in the least. But," he added, nervously, "about Harding Hanaper. He has influence *there*, which he ought not to have, and a word from him——"

"And a word from me to him?" said Pauline. "No, I am afraid. You see, I must keep any little trifling influence I have for my own family, like Lady Laura, and for my slaves, who work for me and gratify my whims."

Sir Hopkins looked at her piteously. He understood perfectly. "I shouldn't have alluded to it; I was irritated, you *know*," he said, almost im-

ploringly. "Family honour and chivalry. No, it would not be right, indeed."

Miss Manuel burst into a fit of laughter. "What heroics!" she said. "Who dreams of touching the family honour? Not I, indeed, I assure you. But I was only joking, Sir Hopkins. Poor me to have influence with Harding Hanaper, or with any one! They only laugh at us weak women." And she stood up. "I have heaps of letters to write. By the way, I have just written to Harding Hanaper." And she pointed to a note in the distance.

Miserable irresolution was in Sir Hopkins's anxious face. But he could not resist going out with pride and dignity, and doing a bit of the old Waipiti intrigue. "You are very cruel to me, Miss Manuel," he said. "You bear malice, I see. Good-by."

Miss Manuel stood in the same attitude for many moments, watching the door by which he had passed. "I hold him," she said, triumphantly, "in the hollow of my hand. The wretched creature would sell his soul for office." She was turning to go to her desk, when the door was opened softly, the worn face was put in again, and Sir Hopkins said:

"If you are not busy now, Miss Manuel——"

"Busy," said she, "not at all! We can have an hour's comfortable chat, and tea—I know you like your afternoon cup of tea—and, shall I tell them to let in no one?"

Sir Hopkins looked over irresolutely in the direction of Mr. Harding Hanaper's note. It was not gone. He drew in his chair, laid his hat on the ground beside him, as he always did, and said, "Shall I tell you a story——?"

"I see I shall have to re-write my letter," said Miss Manuel, tearing up Mr. Hanaper's letter.

"So you see," said Sir Hopkins, with his old Waipiti smile, as he rose to go away, having quite talked himself into a fluent diplomatic vein, "so you see it is nothing but a bit of old family scandal. Such things gather at the skirts of every respectable house in the country. Where there are young men, there will always be a little folly of this kind. Miss Manuel, I believe Mr. Harding Hanaper is still in town, and——"

"And this is all?" said Miss Manuel, with her eye fixed coldly on him; "this is all?"

"This is all," Sir Hopkins said, going away.

"Very well," said she; "I shall go to my letters."

When he had gone, Miss Manuel said to herself, "He has not told a quarter of the truth! He thinks he can keep his wretched old hand in practice on *me*! If he chooses to play these tricks, he must pay the penalty. I gave him one chance, and he has thrown it away." She then sat down to her letters. She did not write to Harding Hanaper, but to her fresh elderly friend, Sir John,

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“DEAR SIR JOHN,—As you mentioned that you were anxious about that foolish ward of yours, who is so determined to become a husband, I am Samaritan enough to let you know that I am likely enough to know something that may be useful. You seemed annoyed about the business, and I could not help taking this trouble to assist you. In the mean time, I would advise your not going to Lady Laura Fermor, as you seemed to think of doing, until we hear something more.

“PAULINE MANUEL.”

Sir Hopkins, passing again, saw the messenger go with the notes in his hand. He chuckled and became two years younger on the spot. “I can manage the Waipiti yet, though they talk of superannuating me. You did not get much out of me, Miss Manuel, and I shall be ‘His Excellency’ very soon!”

## CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH.

## THE CLOVEN FOOT.

AT Lady Laura's entertainment was seen Mr. Romaine and the "blancmange-faced" new Mrs. Massinger. There were others, too, of good quality; for young Spendlesham had said that he did not like being "put down" with all sorts of low people. He had his dance, and his many dances, with other young ladies besides Blanche; but he used to come up with his handkerchief to his face, saying, "Well, this is wonderful fun!" Before the night was over he was beside "Lady Lau," pouring into her ear details of a new scheme.

"I say, we must indeed. These things are so easy to get up, and you can hire dresses and properties." The youth was alluding to the entertainment known as *Tableaux Vivans*. "How we

used to get them up at Spendlands! I was Cardinal Wolsey. I could get the dress again, I know."

The veteran's heart sank within her at the costly nature of this species of show, and some faint protest escaped her, something about the "smallness of their house." The youth, sensitive and selfish, laughed this off pleasantly. "Small! Not a bit of it," he said; "we shall squeeze them all in. It will be splendid. Leave it to me." Lady Laura, who felt that this, indeed, if laid on, would be the last straw upon the sadly worn and strained camel's back, in these desperate straits thought of a dismal ruse. She was looking round mysteriously, and putting her face close to Young Spendlesham's with marvellous significance. "It would be charming," she said; "such a treat for the girls! But you know old Lady Bowler—next door, you understand—she would let loose her whole conventicle on the poor children, and then, you know, she is dreadful, my dear. Lord, you don't know how she embitters our life."

This social exhumation of Lady Bowler had its effect, and silenced the youth. But he was sullen and aggrieved. "Very well," he said; "just as you like. It makes no matter, none in the world. The Chillingworths said something to me about it yesterday, and they have *such* a 'jolly room.'"

Lady Laura had still her smile "on;" but it was a sickly smile. At this moment came up Blanche, with an officer in custody. The bright young creature, full of natural warmth and animation, was eager for news.

"You have settled it all," she said, enlarging the officer, "I see you have. Isn't it delightful, mamma? Lord Spendlesham says I am to be Pomona, and be all over gold apples."

The youth's hands found their way gloomily to the depths of his pockets. "O no! No, no!" he said, "it's all given up; that is, at your house; and there's some tract woman or Methodist that won't have it. But it makes no matter. I shall get it up at the Chillingworths'."

The look of reproach and silent agony that the dutiful child flung at her mother, would be hard to describe. "It is all a mistake," she said. "Nonsense. Mamma doesn't mean it."

Lady Laura saw by this time that delay would be fatal; so she bent down her poor overloaded worn bleeding camel's hump, and took up this last burden with assumed cheerfulness.

The whole was settled that night. Young Spendlesham laid out reckless schemes of expense. He enlisted arbitrarily a whole corps before the night was over. "I tell you who I have made up my mind to have; that little Mrs. Fermor."

"Charles's wife?" cried Blanche, faintly.



“Do you know, I like Charles’s wife,” said the young lord, pleasantly. “There is something so smart and quick about her. I am sure she is good fun. Yes, we shall have Charles’s wife, but not Charles himself. There’s Romaine. I must speak to him.”

Fermor—the poor pariah of the party, the interdicted from the fire and water of conversation—kept at the door. He had now grown sensitive, scorning to intrude himself or his gifts upon *mamas* with absently roving eyes and business-like daughters.

Standing in this mood, he saw Hanbury come up the stairs—the new and changed Hanbury, with his curious mournful manner. He seemed to bring with him all the old Eastport associations, and Fermor walked hastily away. “He will be coming to me,” he thought, “and playing off his new Werner character. He means all the women to be pointing to him, and wanting to know the story of his blighted heart. I wish to Heaven I was out of this place, and out of the whole concern!”

In a few minutes Hanbury was beside him. “I am so glad, Fermor,” he said. “It is so long since I have seen you.”

“You come out to parties, it seems?” said Fermor, with a half sneer.

“Not often,” said Hanbury, sadly. “I never

cared for such things, as I dare say you recollect. What brought me here to-night was the hope of meeting you. I had something to tell you. Just come out here on the stairs."

"Why not here?" said Fermor, more and more resenting the "Werner manner."

"I know," said John Hanbury, interpreting all this, and coming back the little way he had gone, "that I never succeeded in making myself a friend of yours, and that by some unfortunate mistake we never were as well known to each other as we might have been. Something came in the way. I did not understand you; very likely you did not understand me. I know I am rough, and have my faults. Perhaps, if we had both tried sincerely to be more at one, a hundred things might not have happened. But that is all past."

Again this tone grated on Fermor. Had Hanbury said merely that *he* could not understand Fermor, and that if *he* had tried to do so, he could not, it would have been more deferential.

"I never try to understand any man," said Fermor, coldly. "It is too much trouble. I take what is on the surface. But this business, as you say—what do you wish me to do for you?"

John Hanbury shook his head, as though he said, "You *will* not understand me. Very well," he said; "it is about yourself, Fermor. You know there are not many things in life that I have much

interest in now. The Manuels and their happiness is all I think of. What they love and have loved, I care for. There was one, Fermor, whom we knew, and whose dear memory we cling to, and it is for her sake, and for the sake of what I know were her last wishes, that I now——”

“I don’t know what object you have,” said Fermor, colouring, “in making these allusions, or in bringing up this subject; but I must tell you plainly I do not like to discuss it.”

“This is the way,” said John Hanbury, hopelessly. “I always say more than I mean, and I know I am blunt and rough in approaching subjects. But, Fermor, listen to me. I say I would do anything for the Manuels. And you, Fermor, do not see the world so much now—at least, have not the opportunity of hearing what I can hear. Do forgive me if I speak too plainly; but it is indeed for your interest. I don’t know how to approach it, and I am sure you will not like it, but I must speak. I know it would be her wish. Mrs. Fermor is so gentle, so trustful, so——”

“Now, Mr. Hanbury,” said Fermor, his voice trembling, “I must request that this subject will not be pursued. You are, as you say, well meaning, though unfortunate in your manner. I don’t want to hear about it. I don’t want advice from *any* man. I can manage my own house. Everybody seems to think they can lecture me about

my own concerns; and I tell you again, I don't require it, and *won't have it.*"

"But you don't know the danger," said Hanbury, desperately. "You don't see what is coming. I know more than you think. It is my duty to warn you, no matter how you may take it. That Romaine, I tell you, is not the man to be so intimate at your house, and you should look after it. Forgive me, but every one is talking of it."

"Once more," said Fermor, excitedly, "I tell you to stop this, Mr. Hanbury. I won't take it. So you wish to be an adviser? You must excuse me for saying that I shall not come to you for assistance. Your counsels, as regards your own interest, have not been so very successful."

"No, indeed," said he, sadly; "you are right. But I must tell you this, at all risks. I know your affairs. There is that Sir John Westende: he is a dangerous man. You should go to him, and conciliate him. Ask Lady Laura, and she will tell you the same."

This was past endurance.

"You won't take a hint, Mr. Hanbury?" said he, struggling to be calm. "Let me ask you, do you wish to quarrel, or to hear something from me that I should be sorry to have said?"

"O, you shall not quarrel with me," said Hanbury, calmly, and turning away. "Nothing that you could say," he added, solemnly, "shall ever

offend me. There are reasons why you should be privileged. You seem blinded, Fermor : you will not be guided ; but I shall not desist. I shall help you in spite of yourself."

The state he left Fermor in may be conceived. He always felt agony under the sense of this air of what he took for superior patronage.

He then saw Romaine come over to Mrs. Fermor, and pitch his chair close to hers, as it might be a tent. She was in a corner, and Mr. Romaine's tent quite cut her off from the company. He then began to talk with great earnestness. Fermor's falling on this new situation, and Fermor's memory suggesting to him the stories the good-natured friend had told him, the effect was as of scarlet cloth tossed and shaken before him.

"Look at Orson," said Mr. Romaine, moodily, "how he is glaring at us!"

Mrs. Fermor looked up innocently, but did not see which face he meant.

"Orson?" she said ; "whom do you call by that ugly name?"

"Don't you see," he said, "*your* conjugal Orson? You know what I mean."

Mrs. Fermor, colouring as she always did, moved back her chair a little, and half rose.

"You can't mean *that*," she said ; "I am sure not. At least, if you do, I must go to the person you mention so disrespectfully."

“Exactly,” he said, without moving. “Always the way—every little idle word caught up and registered. Why, I call every husband Orson. What are they all but Orsons—brutes—irreclaimable savages? What am I myself? And what do *you* think me in your heart of hearts, but a wild, untamed Orson, fresh from the woods?”

Mrs. Fermor felt a twinge. She felt for this poor rude man, who had no friends; no kith nor kin, and who was grateful for a little sympathy, and over whom *she held such a secret power*. So she said, quickly, “No, no, I don’t agree to that. You are not quite so bad.”

“How good *you* are,” he said, with grateful eyes. “I am but an acquaintance, but those who know you better, how *they* must appreciate; for instance, your husband, whom I so thoughtlessly and irreverently called ‘Orson.’ How he must prize and cherish, how ‘uxorious’—is not that the word?—he must be, even to fatigue; he must play the doting husband to perfection! Eh?”

Again the old doubting look came on Mrs. Fermor’s face. She did not answer. A pink, handsome, and rather foolish face then came to Mr. Romaine, and said:

“I say, Romaine, why don’t you come? My wife has sent me for you. She has all sorts of secrets, and has been signalling this half-hour.”

Romaine threw Mrs. Fermor a look of signi-

ficance, as who should say, "You see." He stooped over and said, in a low voice, "Do you know what is behind all this? Riding to-morrow in the Park—a pic-nic the day after—then a three weeks' visit down at Massinger. They are filling their house, and *she* says they can't get on without me. These are the little secrets. Give a poor outcast your advice—come."

Mrs. Fermor, with glowing cheeks, could not restrain her little smile of pride. She had the bold dangerous man completely in her power, to mould him for his own good. "You will not go," she said. "You must not go; at least, I have no influence, I know, but——"

"No influence!" he said, and paused. "Well, I say nothing of that. They will have their plays—'amateur theatricals' as they call them. They will make me the 'premier amoureux.' Why, even that donkey Spendlesham is getting them up. Tableaux, he calls them. They are to have you. He has just asked me. Ah! you could act! What parts shall we choose—Alexander and the two Queens, or Petrarch and his Laura?"

A little bewildered at this rambling speech, Mrs. Fermor could only say, "O no, indeed I could not."

"*You* no influence?" he went on. "Yes, you have. I confess it. I have felt it for weeks back growing steadily every day. I cannot trust myself,

but I can trust you. Don't think that your life is not known to me, and that I do not feel for you. I know what goes on in your house. I know—and forgive me for saying so—that there has been one more fatal mistake added to the tremendous list of mistakes, now nearly full——”

“Mr. Romaine,” she began, much frightened.

“Stay. I confess,” he went on, “at first I met you with that indifference which I feel for every woman. But this has been wearing away. It is altogether worn away *now*. O, you might do much with me—much more than you have done. But things cannot go on always as they go on now. My heart burns to see one that I call Orson so cold and neglectful, when there is one as you know and understand——”

“I *do* understand,” said she, in a perfect tumult of terror and surprise, and trembling with agitation. “At last—O let me out—let me go! You shouldn't have done this, Mr. Romaine—for shame, for shame! O let me out quick—let me pass!”

He never moved. “That is well done,” he said. “Now I go on: ‘O lovely Laura! what rage in those flashing eyes! You cannot conceal the flutterings of your heart,’ and so on—— We shall do it very well together on Spendlesham's boards.”

For a moment she was astounded at this readi-



ness and coolness; but in another moment the earnestness of his first speech came back upon her, and she said again, "O for shame, for shame! It was very cruel of you! O, what do you mean? Now let me go; and you must never, never speak to me again."

At this moment Fermor came striding up. He had been looking on. He pushed past Romaine rather rudely, put out his arm for his wife, and said, in a fierce whisper, "Come away at once. You seem lost to all shame! You are making me the talk of the room. Come at once. Come home. You shall answer to me for this!"

The little woman, so warm and impetuous, had behaved nobly and chivalrously, as she fancied. She was firmly determined never to open her lips to Romaine again; and yet *this* was her reward!

Fermor saw the resentment in her face. "I suppose you mean to brave me here, before all these people?" He was beside himself with rage. "Come away, I say—have at least some semblance of respect and decency."

"Respect and decency!" said Romaine, laughing. "What odd words you use, my good Fermor."

"Would you allow us to go by?" said Fermor, with forced politeness.

"With all my heart," said the other. "But you gave us such a start. We were talking of

such interesting things. But all secrets, remember, Mrs. Fermor; or your husband will have me out the first thing in the morning."

This, though spoken gaily, contained a hint for Mrs. Fermor, which she could not but take.

Fermor made no reply, but hurried her down stairs. "We must see about this," he said, under his breath, "and settle the thing one way or the other. You are at perfect liberty to consult your own reputation as you please, but I am determined I shall *not* be made the laughing-stock of the town. I am not to be compromised."

He felt her arm trembling on his, but she said nothing. Here was injustice—monstrous, killing, injustice. Something like the shade of a blight flashed across her.

As they went home in the little dark brougham, there was one of the old stormy miserable scenes. "You can have no respect for me, and none for yourself," said the little woman, trembling, "to say such things publicly." She was about to add, "If you only knew;" but she was checked, for she felt that she dare not even hint at Romaine's behaviour. "You never speak to me kindly; you never take me anywhere; you never encourage, never protect me, as I see other husbands treat their wives. No, but you are too cold, and care for nothing in the wide world but for yourself. As, indeed, Mr. Romaine says"—and she was about to quote that

speech of his about "fatal mistakes," but she stopped in alarm.

"Go on," said he, with forced calmness; "pray tell us what Mr. Romaine says. So it is come to this," he said, with a new burst. "But it serves me right. They warned me in time, but I foolishly would not listen."

With quivering lip Mrs. Fermor retorted—she was very quick of temper, it must be repeated—"And I was warned too. But I should like to know who has gained most by the affair. I tell you, you will not dispose of me as you did of others. *My* heart shall not be broken, nor shall I wear myself into the grave to suit your plans."

"No fear, indeed," said he, with a trembling voice. "She was an angel, a gentle, quiet, sweet, angel. God forgive me for that crime, it was the great mistake of my life. I did not know what I was doing. I must have been mad."

"And you speak of it in this way to me," said Mrs. Fermor, beside her little wits, from grief, and wounded vanity, and rage. "Ah! you will tell me, next that you married me for papa's money. Go on and finish; we may as well hear it all out now!"

"Suppose I say I did," replied he, unable to resist the taunt; it was now a battle à outrance. "Suppose I say that I did. It was what they called a good match. It is not the first thing of

the kind that has been done! It was an unfortunate day for me, God knows! I might have been happy and peaceful now—in my proper station in society which I have lost, instead of being——Confusion!” he added, in a fresh burst, as he thought of all his wrongs and insults.

“I have been a fool and a madman!—But I tell you I shall see to all this, and it *shall* be changed. They shan’t point to me as a cypher, nor shall any of the rude low admirers you choose to encourage make me their butt. Never!” he added, vehemently. “So, as a beginning, I insist and require and command that you never exchange a word in future with that man Romaine.”

“How dare you speak in this way to me?” said she, hysterically.

“Mind what I have told you; and I shall see that you do what you are told to do. I shall see myself that it is done. I want no argument.”

“Ah! then, we shall see,” said Mrs. Fermor, with defiance.

Not a word more was spoken on that dismal passage home. When they entered, she flew upstairs, and rushed into her father’s room.

## CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH.

### A DISCOVERY.

GRIM Mr. Carlay was reading when his daughter entered, and flung herself down at his knees, sobbing and crying hysterically. Her rich long hair had broken from all fastening, and came tumbling about her in a shower.

“My heart is breaking,” she said; “help me, papa. He is killing me!”

A spasm of pain passed over his face for a moment, and he drew a deep sigh.

“My poor child,” he said, with wonderful affection for so grim a being. “The old story; I knew it was hurrying on to this. We try every one else, and, after all, we come back to the old father or mother.”

“But O!” continued she, “he has dared to slander me; to insult me publicly. He is killing me. This very night——”

“I understand,” said he. “I know it all. I have at last come to know him thoroughly. He is a wretch without a heart; faithless and unworthy of you and your affection.”

“He has insulted me!” she said, starting up with a fierce pride. “I shall never forget it. I shall never forgive it. If he only knew that at the very instant he was accusing me—at that moment I was behaving in a way that he should have been proud of! But let he himself take care. He talks about being sensitive of his own reputation, and about being pointed at. I say, papa, let *him* take care!”

“These are no discoveries to me,” said her father, sadly.

“Ah! then why,” said she, turning round, “why did you let me be sacrificed? He tells me now openly that it was your money he wanted, and that he sold himself. Why did you allow this sale, if you knew so much, papa?”

“My darling,” said he, “I thought your heart was set upon it, and I wished to gratify you in every way. I was foolish—stupid, but,” said he, rising and stalking to the door, “it is not too late yet. I have worse to tell you, darling; things which it is right that you should know—things

that I have discovered. For I have not been shut up all day and night among musty books. I have been searching, watching—spying, some would say—but all for you.”

“Yes,” said she, eagerly; “tell me all, papa!”

He went on hurriedly:

“I suspected *him* from the beginning. Men do not forsake their homes and always be found abroad, or be harsh to their wives, without some outside reason. I know the world pretty well. These things repeat each other every day and every hour. What would you say if that friend of your heart—that bright, noble Miss Manuel—the heroine—whom you watched in sickness, and have almost worshipped, who has kissed you, as you told me, over and over again——”

Mrs. Fermor started back. “Impossible!” she said. “You don’t know her, father. What has she done, then?”

“She is your enemy. She it is who has drawn away your husband from you. This is the secret of his absences. She has been trading on the old miserable vanity with which he is stuffed. He has been there day after day. Nights, when he was away till three and four, he was at her suppers. He was watching for her in the Parks, hanging about her street, about her carriage. And all because she made some speech that has set his pride rampant. And she your friend, whom you

almost saved from death. In this way she repays you !”

Mrs. Fermor was looking at him quite scared. “O no, no,” she said, in a low voice, and drawing back; “this is not so. You don’t know her.”

“Ah, listen !” he said, catching her by the hand. “How *could* she like *you*? You are in her sister’s place. It is not in human nature. You had better know the worst, darling. Look here !” and he opened his desk, and took out some half a dozen letters, which he opened slowly, one after the other. “Would you not know her writing? Look at this,” and he showed her first that old letter of Miss Manuel’s, in which she had invited Fermor to her supper, and then others in the same strain; notes, notelets, long, short; on large paper, on small paper, and on tiny scraps, signed only with initials; all the tokens, in short, of an intimate relation. “Here are answers,” he went on, “and you will know *this* hand.” And he spread out Fermor’s notes in the same way. Mrs. Fermor looked from one to the other of them, and back again, very wildly and distractedly. “This is,” he said, “what the world would call shabby and dishonourable. But I love my child and her happiness, and scruple at nothing to effect that.”

“My happiness !” she said, sadly.

“Yes, your happiness,” he answered, quickly; “it will all lead to that. The first step is knowing



the worst. The next is, to look out for a remedy : and we must have done with this man—done with him for ever.”

“Done with him for ever?” she repeated, mechanically.

“Yes,” he said; “he is not worthy of you. We shall leave this miserable country, and leave him. It was a wretched mistake from the very beginning. Once freed from him, we shall begin to be happy together again. You will get ill, my child; already I find your cheeks pale and worn. Abroad, there is joy and happiness and comfort in store for us yet. If you remain, you die.”

“Leave *him* here with her? Never, papa, never, while I live!”

“He is not worth a thought,” said he, hastily. “We *must* go. It is the only course.”

“And leave *him* behind freed from me, whom he hates, to enjoy himself, and leave *her* no punishment? Never, papa. Let me stay and die.”

“Who knows?” said her father, gloomily; “we may punish him before we leave. But all in good time; depend on it, the guilty shall not escape.”

“And O!” burst out Mrs. Fermor, giving way suddenly to a paroxysm of tears, “she, that woman whom I tried to make my friend; whom I loved!”

## CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH.

## "OLD FOLEY."

SIR JOHN WESTENDE, though a squire, was crafty enough in his generation. He thought Miss Manuel's counsel good as to the secrecy, and did not show his hand too soon. He was even friendly with his nephew, and said to him in his rough way, "Well, if you will make a born ass of yourself, you must." But at home he indemnified himself by swearing and railing at his daughters, telling them they were "a hopeless, helpless pack," and that he was "sick of the whole lot;" ending generally with a violent question as to "what were they staring at him in that way for?" and finally bidding them "get out of his sight, for he couldn't stand them!" And the poor frightened motherless girls, who had this paternal food served to them

every day, with the regularity of meals, fled away from his presence like a flock of sheep from the shepherd's dog.

Lady Laura, too, had a consciousness of a danger. For the first time in her life she began to give way to a sense of hopelessness, and to give entrance to the grim and gloomy visitors called forebodings. As she turned round to north, south, east, and west successively, and saw the passage growing blocked in each direction, she began to feel sudden sinkings of the heart for the first time during her fifty or sixty years' struggle. These, however, might have been the natural weakness of coming age. She had fought, suffered, and received such cruel scars, that it was no wonder she should feel pains.

From the first she had divined the opposition from Sir John Westende, and had tried to bring him over. But she well knew he had never forgiven her—not so much for the mortification, as for the years of tyranny which she had indirectly brought on him. For he was one of those ferocious wild animals who roar, and tear, and even devour the spectators, but who are surprisingly tame and docile under the eye of the keeper. She even tried to stir the cold ashes of the old romance, with her fan, and let a few of the white particles float in the air, but this she saw was only a further stimulant. She then wisely gave up all attempts

at conciliation, and determined for fighting in the open field.

He went to consult Miss Manuel again. He burst into his old complaints. "Is it not shameful?" he said. "There should be an act of Parliament to protect boys against these women. I'll show the whole system up, if I die for it. On my soul, I believe she will put him in a coach some night, and marry him before the child knows what he is doing. The worst is, I don't see my way. Can you think of something?"

Miss Manuel thought a moment. "You know Sir Hopkins Pocock?" she said. "Very well. A wretched, restless, agitating creature, who would sell his soul for place. Go to him, and talk of your influence. That private family skeleton we spoke of the other day," she said, smiling, "is in some museum, in the country somewhere. It has been smuggled away, but can be recovered."

Sir John, a country gentleman, did not quite follow. "What about skeletons?" he said.

"I mean," said Miss Manuel, "the little secret story you hinted at the other day. It may be worth nothing: but still, where the interest of a child, your ward, is concerned, everything is fair. You might use this as a lever."

"A lever! yes," said Sir John, still doubtful; "but where did you get about the skeleton?"

"A mere figure of speech," said she; "a way

people have of talking. Or stay," she said; "there is Major Carter, who knows all the world, and is flattered by attention. Ask him to dine, and he may help you."

Sir John Westende took both courses. From Sir Hopkins, who cringed to him with senile homage, he heard of an old Peninsular colonel whom he himself had known, and Major Carter, who knew all the world, was likely enough to have fallen in with him.

"If I could only light on that old Foley now," he thought. "He knows and knew everything, and every story. But he is dead long ago; had to live at some of those wretched half-pay French foreigneering places." (Sir John took the true squire's view of Boulogne and other foreign ports, as being solely created for English gentlemen of limited means.) He asked Major Carter about it.

"The old colonel dead?" said the major. "Not he! Lives at Dunkirk, of all places in the world! But he says he gets his rubber there. He was here last week, but has gone back, I am afraid. The colonel's purse is not very deep, unless, indeed, he has made something out of his whist here. Shall we go and see him, Sir John? By the way, I forget. Did you know him?"

"Not met him for years," said Sir John. "But I have a particular reason for wishing to meet him now." Then he told Major Carter (whom he said

he saw was "a man of the world") what this reason was.

"Just the man!" cried the major. "You have a surprising instinct, Sir John! Why, he could write a book, the most delightful work of our times, all the scandal, all the divorces, all the esclandres—the *true* history, you understand, Sir John! He has them all at his fingers' ends. It would be the most fascinating book."

The old Peninsular colonel must have made profit out of his whist; for he was still in Town, in the bay-window of his club, with his newspaper attached to a stick, which he handled as if he were a pointsman signalling a train. He had a very large hat on. The blood in his face was so marbled and extravasated that it seemed as if made out of good Bologna sausage; while his stock was so stiff and straight that it seemed as if he were always looking out of an iron chimney-pot after having newly swept a gigantic chimney. He was glad to see Carter, and was glad to see Carter's friend, for he had just done with his pointsman's flag, and was thinking of sherry. "Have something?" he said. "No?" And having "had something" himself, the marbled Bologna sausage surface seemed to become illuminated from within, and glowed.

The major very soon led them across France into the Peninsula, and took them back some thirty or forty years, and called up Lord Wellington and

Pack, and Beresford, and that “chicken-hearted” scoundrel, Joseph. “Why, dammy!” roared the colonel, the Bologna sausage distending alarmingly, “we had a little drummer that would have stood up to him, and made him run.”

“You had queer days in Madrid that time, colonel,” said the major.

“Ay, ay,” said the Peninsular colonel, “both then and later. I was there in ’twenty-five, too, and met some of the old set. What times we had, sir. Dammy, sir, there are no *men* on earth now. No men, sir, with real heads and stomachs. They don’t know how to drink! It ain’t life now; at least, it ain’t life as it used to be”—then added the colonel, as a dropping shot after a volley—“dammy!”

“The colonel,” said Major Carter to Sir John, with great approbation, “knows, and has seen a great deal. It is really instructive to hear him.”

“Bless you!” said Colonel Foley (using the benediction precisely in the same meaning as he did his favourite malediction)—“Bless you! I could tell you stories by the yard! Ay, sir! and stories that would take your wind away, sir; and, sir, about some of the—ve-ry—first—families in the country,” added he, stooping forward, and speaking slow; “the very first. Ay, sir, and some of your fine high women,” he continued, glowing at the recollection of some neglect, “who now give

themselves airs; I could have them at my knees, crying, 'For God's sake, don't expose us! Dammy, colonel, don't!'

"Did you ever," said Sir John, a little impatient at the colonel's reminiscences, "fall in with a person called Fermor?"

"Fermor? Fermor?" said the colonel, searching his memory. "Ah, to be sure! I suppose I didn't know Lady Laura — a fine spanking creature she was! I could tell you some of her games. By the Lord, sir, the night of the fresco business down at the what-d'ye-call-'em villa on the Thames, and we had the walks lit up, excepting the arbour, which was forgotten, dammy, sir, if I didn't——"

Major Carter here nervously interposed, "Our friend, Sir John, is connected, I believe——"

"No, no," said Sir John, hotly. "I have nothing to say to them. And I don't care what is said of them. There was a story, Colonel Foley, some thirty years ago; as a club man you knew it—we all knew it; I should know it myself, but somehow my memory does not help me now. I want to find that story. You remember a scampish fellow they had among them, Fermor's brother, that went to the dogs?"

"Ah! you're right, you're right," said Colonel Foley, with great enjoyment. "Ah, Jack Fermor, I knew him, sir! I once lent him ten pounds, and



dammy, sir, if I wasn't the only man he ever paid——”

“But what was the business?” asked Sir John, impatiently; “it was cushioned in some wonderful way.”

“Bless your soul,” said the colonel, with the same absence of spiritual meaning, “that was *her*, all her! She managed the whole of it. She had the spirit of ten men. Did you ever know that she went over herself, and settled it all?”

“Ah!” said Sir John, with great interest, “that was the way it never got out.”

“Exactly, sir. It was the middle of winter, too, with ice, sir, as thick as that book, sir,” pointing to a London Directory. “And up-on my soul, sir, she was expecting to be confined of her first child. That I know. And I call that a fine plucky, spanking thing of her. As for the quiet sneak Fermor she married, he wasn't fit to sweep that crossing, sir.”

“He was a poor creature,” said Sir John, cordially.

“She settled the whole business, sir. Saw the consuls, ministers, every man Jack of them, talked to them, bought them—seventeen and sixpence went a long way then in those foreigneering courts—and brought off her man! What was better, sir, not a soul could make out what it was all about.”

“Precisely,” said Sir John. “I never could get at it.”

“That was *her*, you see,” said the colonel. “If I didn’t admire her for it! I was one of the few that knew about the business, and, dammy, if she didn’t bring me round—round and round again, sir. Now, is she going on still?”

“What did I tell you, Sir John?” said Major Carter, in delight. “Is not the colonel pleasant? We ought to get him to come and fix a day before he goes back to Dunkirk.”

“Ah, yes,” said Sir John, eagerly, “the very thing. You must dine with me, colonel; a little snug private dinner—only ourselves.”

“Dammy,” said the colonel, “how gluey I feel. They swindle us at this place with their infernal bottles—they don’t half fill ’em. Here, waiter, soda. They keep the worst lot of servants in the kingdom. Well, where was I? I could talk this way until midnight. Here, you! bring that after me to the smoking-room. You don’t mind coming there, eh?”

Sir John was a man of business, and had his time pretty well filled up. “I tell you what, colonel,” he said, looking at his watch, “dine with me to-day—you and Carter here—at my club. A snug little thing. Only ourselves.”

“I will, upon my soul,” said the colonel, eagerly,

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and almost ferociously. “That will be more like it. Good Lord!” he said, by no means conscious of any devotional appeal, “what things I could tell you, if I only could collect my wits. Talk of old What-his-name’s Recollections, which I’m told they’re all reading now! Why, dammy, I could beat him against a wall, story for story. Why, they’re nothing but slops, mere slops, sir!”

## CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH.

## COLONEL FOLEY'S REMINISCENCES.

THAT evening, at Sir John's club—the Country Gentleman's—which, the colonel said, he was glad to see had none of their “eternally lost” gewgaw “sugar-stick” stuck over it inside and out—none of your “sickening theatrical scene-shifting places—all windows,” where you caught your death of cold, but a snug, old-fashioned place, where all the high-priced papers were taken in, and where brass buttons and yellow trousers were familiar to the eye: at this club, then, in a private room, the three gentlemen had a pleasant little dinner.

“This is something like,” said the colonel. “I call this a place for a gentleman! Dammy, I don't want to be stuck up in a plate-glass case,

like a dried fish in a museum, so that the people in the streets may stare up at you. I don't call *that* sort of thing a club. And the stuff they give you! You might as well put a file down my throat as the liquor we had to-day." Which community in the participation of the brandy was a pardonable delusion on the colonel's part.

He was very amusing, this old colonel. But some of his stories were frightful. *He* did not deal in what he called "slops." Men and women—widows, virgins, and wives—he slaughtered wholesale—like the great Human Sacrifices at Dahome. Later he came back to the subject of the morning.

"I never saw such a wild scamp of a creature as that Fermor. Our wine merchant—indeed, everybody's wine merchant; and gave capital wine, I must say. Gave more for nothing than he did for money. No fellows were entertained better. That was 'twenty or 'twenty-five. Let me see, now, which was it, dammy?" and the Peninsular colonel began to ruminate over this point, for his old memory, like his old eye, was getting very dim. "Twenty-five it was. I have it now, the year I got my captaincy (Sergeant, who was before me, was shot in a duel by the Spanish minister's son). Well, that Fermor soon, as you may imagine, found the wine business not to answer. He was so extravagant—nothing could stand him—and as wild

as a hare. Very thick with the governor, and the governor's wife, too—a fine woman, though—but so stuck up, you know. Dammy,” said the colonel, excited by the memory of repulse, “there was no going within a mile of her. Why, I dined there four days in the week. Well, when I came back again, dammy if the wine business hadn't all broken up; and what do you suppose my friend was at, eh, now? What do you say, now?”

Neither Carter nor Sir John could say; nor, if they could, would they.

“Why, he had set up a little play; nothing short of that. Instead of the wine, we got—you understand—cards and chicken hazard. It was great fun. He got a lot of money out of us. He made it pay, sir. But there was always plenty to eat and drink, too. I never enjoyed myself so much.”

Again the colonel took in sherry, and again the colonel's cheeks fired out with the suddenness of the illumination of St. Peter's at Rome.

“Where was I? Well, Jack Fermor went ahead. There were some businesses took place, I can tell you. Bless you, I could sit here until midnight, and be not half done. There was a good pigeoning—in fact (of course excepting some old friends like myself), it was *all* pigeoning. That was the way young Ascot Price was finished off. They

got five thousand out of him, and he shot himself next day. O, Jack Fermor, he was a wonderful scamp! Wonderful!"

There was a tinge of regret in the tone with which the colonel spoke of his old friend—regret mingled with admiration at perhaps the general ill success of such gifts.

"Dammy," said the colonel, apologetically, "I believe it was a queer state of things from beginning to end; but, you see, there was nothing on the surface a gentleman could object to, and it seemed all quite square. A gentleman must find some way of filling up his time in a place like that."

Vice having paid this little act of grateful homage to Virtue, the colonel went on:

"But if Jack 'was a lad,'" went on the colonel, "what do you suppose his friend was? Now, what do you suppose his friend was?" No one, of course, could say. "We were a queer lot out at that time, I can tell you. I suppose never was there such a set got together since the days of Babylon!" (Sir John shivered a little at this unpleasant allusion.) "Well, sir, he had a friend—a quiet soul, with a wife and three little children, a decent, quiet, thoroughly good fellow, in the wine business too; and, dammy! if he didn't want to stay quietly *in* his wine, if he was only let. But

he wasn't. Jack Fermor, sir, had a trick of making other fellows as like himself as two peas. Well, sir, this quiet sheep of a Manuel——”

“Manuel!” said Carter, starting.

“Manuel!” said Sir John, thinking of Miss Manuel; “how odd.”

“So it was,” said the colonel. “But it was odder when Jack got this creature *well* into his hands, and got his money and his savings into his hands too. He did it uncommon clever, did Jack. He was training him, he said. Well, there was another man,” he went on, “who came out there on business, who had a young girl of a wife, whom he was so fond of. Dammy,” said the colonel, laughing, “how we used to laugh at him. He was a Scotchman, and set up to be a cautious, quiet, calculating rascal. But I used to go and see him very often, and so used our set, for reasons that you will perhaps understand. Eh! What d'ye say?”

And the colonel here half closed one of his odious old eyes with exquisite meaning.

“There was about twenty years between him and this child he called his wife. She might have been his daughter five times over: so what do you suppose this stupid set himself to do? Why, he set up for being the old fellow, the fatherly dodge, and kept trying to amuse her in every way, and kept coming to us and bothering; ‘Now do come



and see that poor child, and talk to her. She wants amusement, and I don't know *how* to amuse her.' And didn't we go? O, not at all." And here again the Peninsular half-closed his odious old eye with extraordinary significance. "And one day," he went on, "we took it into our heads to bring that wild scamp Jack Fermor. And Jack Fermor took it into *his* head one day to bring our soft friend Manuel. And our soft friend—leaving his own lady, and his two girls and one boy, at home—came very often to talk to her. Do you see what is coming now?"

The major did, or conveyed by his manner that he did. Sir John did not quite follow.

"He was the queerest young old fellow I ever saw, this Dr. Meadows (that was the Scotchman's name). He must have been close to forty then, and as stiff and hard as a ramrod. We never saw him bend, and we used to call him 'Rod Meadows,' or Roddy Meadows. But it was plain that he was wild about the little white child he called his wife—infatuated, in fact; and it was plain, too, that the little chit did not care particularly for *him*. I may say, without vanity, she liked the company of your humble servant a *deu-side* deal better," added the colonel, with his favourite objectionable motion of his eye. "A lot of us used to come and sit with her for hours, and make her laugh; and I must say your humble servant didn't sit for the

shortest time; no, nor he didn't drive out now and then, and walk a little on what they call their Prado! Dammy, sir, those were the days for real life.

"Well, sir, I know the game old Roddy Meadows was at. It was the gratitude dodge, and the regard, you know, ripening, as they call it, into affection. I have seen life," said the colonel, laughing heartily, "and I never met *that* sort of ripening yet. It didn't ripen with him, my boy, at any rate; but," added the colonel, with a dramatic slowness and significance, "it was ripening with somebody else.

"O," continued the colonel, beginning to ramble a little, his fishy eye staggering somewhat, as it were, "I could go on from this till morning about those days. There's nothing like them now. *These* ain't what you can call days! As for that fellow who writes books about Recollections" (this was always an irritant with the colonel), "what can *he* have to tell, dammy? Stirabout, sir! Tapioca! Gruel, gruel, sir! Ah!" said the colonel, looking almost ill with disgust, "how I hate such slops!"

Most of the colonel's friends knew that about this period he strengthened the weaker portions of his conversation with oaths more strong and frequent. They were a relief, and sent him on the faster.

"Well, about that scamp Fermor. He was

soon at the end of his tether. He had got all he could get, all that was to be begged, or borrowed, or—No,” said the colonel, closing the eye that was in liquor with some difficulty, but with a grotesque humour—“no; he was now coming to *that*.”

“I see,” said Carter, smiling.

Sir John, being a country gentleman, did not see nearly so quickly. “Coming to what?”

“Dammy!” Colonel Foley went on, “if I believe he had only the coat on his back left. He was always in and out of the Scotch fellow’s house. I believe he got round the creature a good bit, and got some dollars out of him. As for the Scotch doctor’s money, I needn’t tell you, who are a man of the world, Carter” (Sir John moved a little uneasily in his chair at this rather pointed exclusion of himself from that class), “that he was not likely to pay *that* up in a hurry. And why the devil should he? But the worst was, he didn’t stop there—This sherry, here, is like mother’s milk to me. I am scalded with the stuff they give us at Dunkirk. As for their clarets and ‘ordinary,’ by the Lord, sir, it really scrapes me here—here, sir,” said the colonel, laying his palm on his watch-chain. “Well, to be short about it, the Scotch fellow, who had gone to the country and wasn’t to be back for a week, came back one night quite sud-

denly, and found——Dammy, now, what d'ye suppose he found?" And the colonel, stretching over for what he had called mother's milk, leisurely filled himself a great glass, as it were to fill up the time while the others were busy speculating. "By Jove! if he didn't find our friend Jack at his desk, stuffing his waistcoat with his notes and gold. Flat burglary, sir! All regularly planned! A most outrageous business. You see it was flag-delic; no getting over it. *There* was the real awkwardness."

"And this was Fermor?" asked Sir John, eagerly.

"No one else. The Scotchman had him pinned by the throat in a second, and was calling in the watch. But the other was on his marrowbones whining for mercy, and I think the Scotchman would have killed him. But—and here was the best of this *con*-founded joke; I declare I went near to bursting with laughter when I heard it" (and his sausage skin went near to rupture at the bare recollection)—"Jack, with wonderful presence of mind, said if he would let him off, he would tell him something about his wife. He didn't know at the moment that something else had been packed up and carried off, you see!" added the colonel, making his jelly eye tumble backwards and forwards with extraordinary meaning. "But he did in an hour. Dammy, sir, if

that smooth pious fellow Manuel hadn't gone off with the wife! and had her waiting ready at an inn outside the town. A few of the longheads had a notion of what was coming." And the colonel hinted with his awful old eye that he was one of these. "It was very bad," he went on, "very bad; for you see Manuel left his own wife and three children, and I must say," added the colonel, in a tone of moral censure, "he had no excuse, literally, *no* excuse. Positively a fine woman. Well, when the Scotchman found all this out, he was near going mad. I never saw such ridiculous nonsense. 'Dammy,' I said to him, 'what *are* you about? Don't make a snivelling donkey of yourself before the town. Take my advice, and say nothing about the business.' But no. I believe he wanted to cut the fellow's throat, and his own afterwards. He went after him for a week, hunted him, caught him, and brought him back. Dammy! I think he wanted to cut him up into collops, and fry him slowly. Sir, you don't know what that family owes to me, and how they treated me! Who was it brought them through that business, that kept the thing quiet and comfortable, but Tom Foley, and perhaps Johnny Adams? The fool would have gone into the street, and poked his injuries into any man's face. I never met such a born donkey. I kept the thing down, and wrote to his relations. He

swore he would have the lives of the two—and clapped them into jail. I declare to you, that gamey woman, Lady Laura, was out with us in a week, with the ice like half a foot of cold iron on the ground. Yet the fellow was no relation of *hers*, you see—no more to her than Adam. And up-on — my — salvation, sir,” added the colonel, mysteriously, “Sir Thomas Dick, the Queen’s own medical fellow, told me often, he didn’t know the minute the thing would have come off! Well, sir, she came. She saw the Scotchman privately, was on her knees to him privately, got round him some way, told him lies, and, what is more, got him to swallow them. And I can tell you, as I am a living man and hope to be saved—dammy!” added the colonel with curious self-contradiction, “she worked the thing, sir, so that she got the ministers, and law, and all those infernal things out of the affair. I never heard of Manuel after. I believe he got off to America, and his widow or wife and her three brats would have starved, if the English hadn’t made up a subscription for them. They got a pound of my money, I know. You *have* to put down, you know, when everybody puts down. I heard they went to England afterwards. And didn’t she get round Adams and me! She was a splendid woman *then*,” added the colonel, with ruminative admiration. “Quite thrown away on the poor creature they married

her to! Well furnished, sir, *here*," said the colonel, with increased relish, and laying his old hands on his shirt front. "She swore both me and Adams solemnly," he added, with winey reverence, "never to breathe a word of the business. 'Pon my soul!" said the colonel, getting more and more excited, "if I had only worked my chances, I should have done well in that quarter. But the fellow that boasts of his affairs is a sneak. Still, I could tell my say as well as most men. Though," added the colonel, thoughtfully, "I found her out afterwards in a clever trick. She got me a majority in a regiment, and, dammy, sir, if I didn't find out, just in the nick of time, that they were sending it to the African coast. I should have been dead in a week. But she caught poor Adams in the same way, who was not so knowing as Tom Foley. She got him on some swamp duty, which made short work of him. But, after all, she was a deu-sed clever woman. O, deu-sed!"

Colonel Foley had not much to say on this point, and his face seemed to have grown so strained, and tightened, and inflamed—so reeking with hot vapours and turpentine spirit—that it seemed dangerous to go near him with a light. His voice, too, was growing thick, and seemed to be fighting its way to his throat through a crowd. Reverting indignantly to the military colonel who had written the Recollections, he characterised

them once more, with bitter contempt, as "Slops—gruel!" and was presently assisted to a cab, and sent home.

Sir John Westende flew to Miss Manuel. "I have Lady Laura now," he said. "Knowing as she is, she shall be no match for me."

He then told her as much of the story as applied to the Fermors. "I managed it uncommonly cleverly," he said. "I wormed it out of an old fellow who knows everything."

"You should be a detective, Sir John," she said, as though she were patting a horse's neck. "They should put you in the force. I shall be quite afraid of you."

"Nonsense," he said, much pleased. "But let *her* look out. She'll find me a policeman, I can tell her. As sure as I am a living man, I shall expose her. If it comes to that, I'll go to the church door and tell the whole thing out, I will."

"She won't let it go to that," said Miss Manuel. "She is too clever. You have the game in your own hands now, Sir John, and can play that poor woman like a fish in one of your own ponds down at Westende. How cruel you are. I am in terror of you."

"By Jove! that is what I shall do," said he, thinking he was deriving a new idea from his own mind. "I have a plan of my own, Miss Manuel. I shall play her. There is no hurry. I'll give a



little more line. That's what I shall do; and pull her up with a jerk. Ha, ha! I'll teach her!"

Sir John, grumbling, and lashing himself in a sort of mulish fury, presently rose to go. When he was gone, her eyes flashed. "They are all working for me," she said; "unclean spirits all; but no matter. They are all converging to the one point. The end is not far away, and it will be soon time to gather up the threads." Then she thought tenderly, but exultingly, of the loved and lost darling that she fancied was looking down on her as she advanced on this course, and whose soft gentle soul she strangely believed would be soothed and propitiated—like some cruel heathen idol—by bloody human sacrifices. Presently another visitor entered, when a soft light passed over her face, and the ruthless spirit she was fondling in her arms disengaged itself and fled away. It was Young Brett.

## CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH.

## A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAD.

YOUNG BRETT had got up once more to London, and had driven from the train to his lodgings, and from his lodgings straight to Alfred-place. He was delighted to see Miss Manuel once more, and almost gambolled round her like a faithful terrier, as he was. "I am *so* glad to see you again," he said, "and to see you so well. Our colonel has given me a month. Some of our fellows were making a jolly party to go over and see the French at Châlons, and the colonel wished me to be with them, but I begged hard to come here, and I am *so* glad, dear Miss Manuel."

She was quite touched at this friendly interest. "You are a good dear boy," she said. "You have been true to me all through—yes, *all* through, and I never shall forget it—never!"

There was a little falter in her voice, and Young Brett darted away from the subject obstreperously.

"The worst is," he said, wistfully, "I am so stupid, I am getting so stupid—I am not clever at doing things. I don't know the way. But now, dear Miss Manuel, here I am. I want to be trained. It will be a charity and a kindness to use me, it will indeed; just to send me about, you know, of messages, and that sort of thing. I delight in the excitement, 'pon my word I do!"

Miss Manuel smiled on him. "I have given you enough work for this year, after that Welsh expedition."

"Well," said he, "I don't think I managed *that* so badly. 'Jove! when I came down first I thought there was a regular mystery, but it turned out very pleasantly. Even that, however, I can take no credit for, for it was really an accident. By the way, that Carter," and Young Brett began to grow hot, and colour at the mention of the name, "what has become of him? I never told you the things he said—though, indeed, I ought not to mention it now."

Her eyes glittered. "*I* know what he said to you as well as if I was standing by and listening. I know what vile things he could say and do. But his time is shortening." She got up and began to walk. "There are people on his track.

It is too soon to tell you everything; but this I will say, that though it seems long since our darling left us, still no one has been sleeping, nor have we forgotten this vile cruel heart, who helped to send her so early to her grave. I am weak, I know, and only a woman, but trust me. I have said it should be Never Forgotten, and it shall be! And I tell you all is nearly ready, and the moment is fast drawing on!"

For the first time she looked steadily at Young Brett for enthusiasm and eagerness, but instead, she saw blank dismay and a sort of hopeless grief. This youth showed everything in his face. "You *don't* tell me this, Miss Manuel," he said, imploringly. "O no! Why, this *is* what he said, and dared to say of you."

"He did!" she said, triumphantly. "Ah! then he has instinct already of what is coming. But he shan't escape. Never! Neither he, nor the other, the *real* murderer, nor the real murderer's wife! We can reach them all, *are* reaching them, and shall overtake them in a very little time! You can help me still, as you have helped me so well."

Again she gave him that triumphant look, expecting encouragement. But Young Brett's eyes were on the ground, and there was a sore wounded expression in his face.

"O then it is true, it is *all* true!" he said, mournfully. "O, Miss Manuel, I could not have

believed this! And it has come like a blow upon me. I told him to his face that it was all false—and indeed I *wish* it had been all false.”

“What,” said Miss Manuel, “and would you have me sit down quietly and submit? I should have died a year ago if I had. Are there laws and punishments to meet crimes like this? No. We must take it into our own hands, and punish for ourselves.”

“But you don’t mean it,” said Young Brett, in a sort of agony. “No, I know you don’t. It is so dreadful to think of. And the poor girl, who has done no harm in the world, and done us no harm. O, there is something shocking in it. And you who are so noble, and so much above us all, and whom I would do anything in the wide world for, to *have* such an idea, I *can’t* believe it.”

Miss Manuel looked at him scornfully. “Are you beginning to be like the rest?” she said. “Very well. It is only being deceived in one more.”

“I know I am very stupid,” said he, still in this tone of despair, “and very useless. I only mean well, and do my best. But, in this sort of thing, I should be miserable all my life, I *know* I should. It is awful to think of. A young wife, Miss Manuel, to be ruined in this way! O, you must think again, do, *do* think again, dearest Miss Manuel, and say—you are joking.”

Miss Minuel *did* feel a sort of self-reproach then. She was silent for a few moments. "Ah, *you* have not lost a sister, and cannot feel. No matter. I was only mistaken. I thought I was secure of you, at least. You were faithful to me. Now I must only go on by myself." Suddenly her voice changed; there came a touching sweetness and affection into her tone. "Ah! But I understand, and do not mean what I say. It is natural in you. You are too noble, and too good for this vile pursuit. It is horrible. But it is my life. I have lived for nothing else. I may as well go on now. I *must* go on, even if I sacrifice everything that loves me, or cares for me."

He shook his head sadly. He seemed to stagger under some blow. "I would do anything for you, Miss Manuel," he said, sadly, "anything. I think at this moment, if you wanted it, I would go into a house on fire, or—anything of that sort. But this young girl—to destroy her, or stand by and see it—O! it would be before me day and night." And Young Brett mournfully took his hat. "And that man Romaine, your friend—O, I am afraid, Miss Manuel, I see it all now."

"Don't leave me," said she. "Ah! don't give me up. *That* is only wanting to finish it. Though, perhaps, it is better to have done with everybody that is good."

"I know I am not," said Young Brett, in grow-

ing excitement, "as good as I ought to be. And I don't set up as being anything of a saint, like some of our fellows; but—but—if this is—to go on—I must—I *must*. O, Miss Manuel, if you will only promise me to give up this dreadful scheme——"

"Very well," said she, proudly, "you *won't* understand me, then. Well, I am grieved; but no matter. As for giving up—no, no. You would have me give up my life. Give up my prayers. Give up the only atonement I can make to our lost darling. Ah! no, no!"

"Atonement to *her*," said Young Brett, more excitedly, "why, it is enough to bring her sweet soul back again to earth. Why, you know, Miss Manuel, it is *in defiance* of her last sweet prayers and wishes, on the very morning that she left us."

Miss Manuel stopped suddenly in her walk, and came up close to him.

"Her last wishes!" she said. "What do you mean?"

"You know," he said; "of course you do! What she sent to Hanbury."

"Sent to Hanbury?" she said, turning pale, and her large eyes straining at Young Brett, "What did she send to Hanbury?"

"Ah, Miss Manuel," he said, "you would not go in the face of her last dear piteous words,

written that very Sunday morning. He showed them to me before he sealed them up and sent them to you."

"What is all this?" said Miss Manuel. "I know nothing of it. There is some dreadful thing that has been concealed from me. Tell it to me all—tell it to me all—at once, and quickly!"

She was so frantic and agitated, that he became alarmed and agitated too. He told her how, about a week after that Sunday, Hanbury had come to him with a letter of Violet's, written on the morning of her death, begging forgiveness for the suffering she had caused him, and hoping that Fermor and his wife, should he ever choose one, would live happily; and conjuring him, as a last favour, never to think of doing anything in the way of avenging her trials or her death. And further, to see that no one else did. This was the substance of Violet's last letter.

"Good God!" said Miss Manuel, sinking into a chair. "This was never sent to me, never told to me. Where is it? Who has it?"

"Hanbury. He gave it to me to send to you the very morning I saw him off at the docks. And indeed I am sure I posted it: indeed I am. Though I am so stupid and clumsy sometimes——" And he stopped and looked round ruefully as this suspicion crossed him.



“Run to him! fly to him!” said she, starting up. “Bring him here. Don’t lose a moment. Bring him here at once.”

He rushed away. By a cruel perverseness, he could not find Hanbury, though he sought him all day long. He left a note for him at a club; and there, late in the afternoon, when Hanbury was glancing at a paper with a dull interest, a servant came, and said a lady was at the door in her carriage, and wished to see him.

By an instinct, he knew that it was Miss Manuel, and came out quickly.

“Will you get in?” she said; “I want to talk to you.”

He was struck with the sudden look of anxious inquiry that had taken up its place in her face, and got in without a word. They drove away. “You are doing too much,” he said; “you will make yourself ill again.”

“*The letter!*” she said, suddenly. “What about this letter? I never heard of it. You never spoke of it. Why didn’t you? Show it to me.”

He knew at once what she meant. For him, as there had been but one Violet, so there was but one letter, and that associated with her.

“Why I sent it to you the morning I sailed,” he said, hurriedly.

“Never reached me, never,” she said, wringing

her hands despairingly. "O, where is it? Drive to your house."

"I have it here," said Hanbury, sadly, taking out his pocket-book. "What I sent was a copy. Here is her own dear writing, soft, sweet, and delicate, like herself."

His voice was trembling, and his fingers were trembling yet more, as he put the writing into her hand. It was as though her gentle spirit had risen up between them. Pauline's eyes swam as she looked on the little pale characters. It may be given here—her last appeal, written on that last Sunday morning:

"DEAR JOHN HANBURY,—They are gone out this morning for a few minutes. I feel happier and a little stronger. I have never been able to tell you how miserable I felt at all the suffering I caused your kind and generous heart; but I was a foolish, thoughtless girl, not so wicked as perhaps I seemed. I saw in your eyes yesterday that you had forgiven me. Let me ask something else, too. Charles will marry and be happy. I so wish, dear John Hanbury, that he and she whom he shall marry may continue happy, and that no wish of punishment or retribution shall ever interfere with them. I know you will do this for me, and add to the proofs of that love you have shown me, and which

I have so unworthily——But I must stop here ;  
and, dear John Hanbury, God bless you for ever !  
as you deserve.

“VIOLET.”

Streaming eyes read this letter. The sweet name Violet was written faintly, and in letters that tottered. Her spirit seemed to flutter gently across the paper. Miss Manuel kissed it frantically, and the next moment it fell from her hands.

“My God !” she said ; “*it is all too late.*”

## CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH.

## CATCHING AT STRAWS.

SHE first flew to Mrs. Fermor, but found that she was out. They did not know where she had gone. Never were there such agitated moments. "Drive quickly, drive quickly!" she cried out to her coachman. But whither? She knew not whom to look for, or whom to find. Romaine, the Destroyer—whom (as she thought with a sort of stab at her heart) *she* had turned loose—he must be found. He was not at his club, not likely to be at his house, was at Richmond, perhaps. She drove to his chambers—he actually *was* in.

She flew up-stairs into his room.

"Here is a surprise!" he cried out; "I should rather say an honour, should I not? Though the

other day your young friend, that pretty little wife, presented herself, and——Why, has anything happened?”

No wonder he put the question, for she looked in deep distress. “It is about her,” she said, a little wildly; “and I have come to you to appeal to you—to your generosity. I have been very foolish, very wicked, I should say (that is to say, I did not know then what I know now). And I want you to do me a favour, the only one I have ever asked you.”

Mr. Romaine shook his head and smiled. “I never make wild promises. But let us hear. We shall see.”

“But you must; you won’t refuse,” said Pauline, desperately, seeing in this answer a hint of what she was to expect. “It is too serious to be trifled with. It will be dreadful if something is not done; and O, Romaine, I conjure you listen to me; I tell you I want to repair a wicked folly of mine, and you only can do it. You must never see this poor child again, or, at least, not speak to her.”

“My dear Miss Manuel,” he said, “let me remind you of the century we live in. Think of the railways, and the telegraph, and Exhibitions. We can’t do these sort of things without being ridiculous. Think, I beg of you.”

“O, but you must not talk in this way,” said

she, half frantically. "You don't know what is coming, or how it will end. Do promise me. You must."

"How it will end?" said he, musingly; "no, I don't. Though I may guess. Why, how unreasonable this is. Was it not you?—or, who was it that first pointed me out this little woman, and spurred me on with some of those little sharp satirical speeches, for which Miss Manuel is so deservedly admired? Upon my word, it almost amounted to a challenge."

"It did, indeed," said Pauline, covering her face. "I own it. It was wicked, horrible, but I thought I was doing right. I did indeed. I want to make reparation, and you must let me, before it is too late."

"Too late?" he said, gloomily; "it *is* too late. You should have come before. These are dangerous games, Miss Manuel. I say it is too late. I have no power in the matter; I cannot stop myself now; a week ago perhaps—Yes, my life has been hitherto rough and cold, and perhaps heartless. *Now*, I feel a glimpse of sunshine. I have not a strong will. I can't do these violent heroic actions, and I don't want to, now—I confess it."

He spoke sternly and excitedly, and in his face she read there was no hope for what she prayed. In great agitation she cried out:

“You cannot mean this—so frightful—so wicked a thing! O, think what a judgment will come on you if——”

“I tell you, Miss Manuel, this wickedness is not mine. I should never have dreamed of it. On their heads be it who forced it on me. I am a selfish, common sort of human savage. I can't do these fine things. I could, perhaps, ten years ago. What made you defy me? No one ever did that without danger. Don't be angry if I tell you I saw your skilful game.”

“O,” said Pauline, with a half groan, “what *am* I to do? What shall I do?”

“It is too late,” he went on, gloomily. “And I don't see how she can be saved. *He* is a low brutal fellow, and has dared to give me some of his airs. I see he will be insolent in a few hours, and I must give him a lesson. Like the true savages that we are, he is ‘taking it out’ of her. He will cringe before me. Poor helpless child. She says she has not one to look to. A ruffian husband, a cold father, and the friend that she loved, and watched over, turning out to be—shall we say, a secret enemy? Is it any wonder that she should come for assistance to the only one who, in his rude way, seems to have some regard for her, poor little soul? No, you can't, Miss Manuel.”

“O, what shall I do?” said Pauline, in a tempest of agitation. “O, if on my knees——”

“Hush, hush!” said Mr. Romaine, rising up. “Think of the nineteenth century, I beg. Why, we seem to be on the boards of the Porte St. Martin. Come, come, Miss Manuel, pull down your veil, and let me see you down respectably to your brougham.”

He did see her down. “God give me strength, and quick intelligence,” she said—almost gasped—to herself as she drove away. “Sweet Violet, look down and pray for me. We shall help her yet.”

Alas! It seemed that supernatural aid were indeed required!

Then Miss Manuel drove away to try again if she could find Mrs. Fermor. She went up-stairs with a fluttering heart. Mrs. Fermor was sitting alone, with pale cheeks, and eyes that seemed to “stare” a little from wakefulness. She had long been expecting this moment—panting for it.

Miss Manuel ran up to her. The hand she took in hers was damp and cold. “You are ill,” she said, alarmed; “what is the matter?”

The cold little hand drew itself away hastily. “You ask,” said Mrs. Fermor, with a trembling



voice. "Is this what you have come to ask about?"

"O, indeed it is," said Miss Manuel, hurriedly, "and I don't know how to begin. I have come to accuse myself, and to throw myself at your feet, and beg your forgiveness for what I have done. I was mad. I knew not what I was doing. I conjure you not to mind what I said and what I did. It is my own work, I know, but I may still save you."

"Save me!" said Mrs. Fermor, bitterly; "this is indeed good news. And how are you to do that, pray?"

"Ah, you suspect me!" said Pauline, sadly. "No wonder. No one seems to heed me now. But I must speak, and speak out. Fly! shun him. Never speak to him again. I know him, and know what he means."

"Whom do you mean?" said Mrs. Fermor, astonished.

"Romaine! I conjure you never speak to him again. I understand his hints, for I know him well; and I have come straight to you from him, to put you on your guard against him."

"Ah, *now* I understand you, Miss Manuel," said Mrs. Fermor, with flashing eyes. "*Now* I see. So *you* come to lecture me, too, about that.

But I can understand who has inspired you. You follow your instructions to the letter. Mr. Romaine! With what face can you come and speak to me in this tone? Ah, I know you now, Miss Manuel! There are other people I am to be on my guard against. God help me! God help me! I have no friends."

"Dear, dear girl!" said Pauline, rushing to her, "some one has been poisoning your mind against me. I know I was wicked at the beginning, but I have repented. O, you know not how I have suffered. But whatever suspicion I bring on myself, I say again solemnly, and conjure you solemnly, shun that dreadful being, whom I know means you harm!"

"I know those who mean me harm," said Mrs. Fermor, with trembling voice. "I know them well. I know who are my friends, too. I want no advice. I am glad you have come, so that I can tell you so. Henceforth I can stand by myself. I shall be independent of friends and of the world. I want no false ones. So now leave me, please, Miss Manuel."

She stood up. Pauline came towards her and tried to catch her hand.

"Don't, don't," she said; "for Heaven's sake, don't take this tone! Think of me, speak to me as you will, but take care, I conjure you. Do

let me know that I have repaired what I have done."

The little lady, with heaving chest and quivering lip, looked at her with scorn.

"If you do not go, I must," she said. "It is not fit that you should come to this house."

At this moment her servant opened the door, and announced "Mr. ROMAINÉ!"

## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST.

## REAPING THE WHIRLWIND.

HE entered with his old easy air, and never even started as he saw the two ladies together.

“Ah, this *is* a surprise,” he said, taking his low chair. “Two visits rolled into one. Miss Manuel, you must know, did me the unexpected honour of a call not an hour ago, and we meet again here!”

What with confusion and grief, Miss Manuel was not herself any longer. She had lost her old readiness and her old sharpness of retort. Not so Mrs. Fermor, who displayed a wild and flurried coquetry.

“I am so glad you have come in, Mr. Romaine,” she said. “I was expecting you.”

“And I have been looking up a dress for you,” he said; “for you must go to this show of Mamma

Fermor's. I brought some pictures from that shop in the Haymarket. Here is a Spanish Ballerina, Mary Queen of Scots—the old story—and a Colleen Bawn. Or, what do you say to a genuine pair, Petrarch and Laura?"

With her eyes fixed defiantly on Miss Manuel, and her lips brought close, Mrs. Fermor answered *her* rather than Romaine.

"Whatever you like; *you* will settle it for me."

"Well," he said, carelessly, "I am for Petrarch and Laura. I can get this made for myself. It will suit me famously."

"Anything you like," said she, vacantly, still answering Miss Manuel. "Choose for me."

"Well, I do choose," he said. "But first, what does Miss Manuel say?"

With a helpless despairing look she turned from one to the other.

"What *can* I say?" she said; "I know nothing of what you mean. It cannot be serious——" And she almost wrung her hands.

"It *is* serious," said Mrs. Fermor, looking at her fixedly; "all real and earnest. Childish days are over, Miss Manuel. I feel more and more like a woman every day. I want to be a woman of the world. I am panting to begin. A real, cold, heartless woman of the world, that has got rid of foolish affection, and of love and scruples, and all that old absurdity. I must begin to live now," added the

poor little Mrs. Fermor, with a piteous desperation, and almost with tears starting to her eyes, "if ever I *am* to live!"

"And let it be my task, O divinest Laura," said Mr. Romaine, starting up into a theatrical attitude, "to teach thee this new art. Thy Petrarch is indifferently skilled in worldly politics, and will be a guide, philosopher, and friend. There, Miss Manuel. Not so bad, I think. We shall make a sensation in our new parts at Mamma Fermor's."

"No, no," said Pauline; "this is all folly, mere childish folly. You do not see the danger. Come! come!" she half whispered to Mrs. Fermor, "ah! come with me. You won't refuse me that little favour? I implore you. I have something to say to you. Come out and drive."

Mrs. Fermor broke from her. "That is *all* over now. I shall not go to you, nor do I want you to come to me. I know you. You have cured me, indeed."

"I tell you it will be ruin, misery, degradation," said Pauline, frantically.

He caught the last words. "What, *you* rehearsing too, Miss Manuel?" he said, with a sneer. "Has Lady Laura secured you, too! How strongly cast we shall be. But come, no tampering with the lovely Laura. *I* know what Miss Manuel is whispering. She has played the same part with me this morning already."

“I dare say!” said Mrs. Fermor, with cheeks kindling afresh. “I have lived but a short time, but I have learnt enough to see what the world is.”

“Well! I started,” said he, “with the assumption that every friend was false, every truth (that is, every worldly truth) a lie—and every profession a humbug. You have now convinced me that it was so. Sometimes you meet with an agreeable surprise, but ninety-nine times out of a hundred I am right. You must come to school to *me*, my dear Mrs. Fermor.”

There was a passion and a tragic intensity in all that the two women spoke and did, that would have mystified any one else. Mr. Romaine knew what was on foot. For him the situation was delightful. Mrs. Fermor, so full of indignant warmth, her cheeks glowing with wounded pride and defiance; Miss Manuel piteously imploring, both in looks and voice.

Her last hope was to be alone with this young creature; then she could tell her all, and make even an abject submission. She would do *anything* to stop this horrible mischief, which now seemed to her to be spreading every hour like some virulent plague. But Romaine seemed to understand this also.

“This is one of my idle lounging evenings,” he said, looking at her steadily; “for a wonder, I

have nothing to do. Business, thank God, I never dirty my fingers with. But there are a hundred little gnats which come buzzing at me, nearly as bad as business—notes and the like. But this afternoon I am free. Come, Mrs. Fermor, shall we order tea? Let us drown our cares in a cheerful bowl.”

Mrs. Fermor flew to comply with his wish with an artificial alacrity—still looking at Miss Manuel. The other saw there was no hope, and went away full of sadness, something like despair. Never was there such a changed being. She had sprung back over the wide crevasse that lay between her and the old Eastport times, and was the gentle loving upright Pauline again. What she had been doing seemed to be the blackest of crimes, a spotted leprosy. “O, what *am* I to do!” she said aloud, in her carriage. “And I can do nothing.”

At this moment she saw Fermor sauntering along moodily. This was now the shape in which most people saw him. In an instant she had stopped her carriage by the pathway, and called to him. He was at her window in a moment. This was on the side next the Park rails.

“O, Captain Fermor!” she said, and he remarked her excited manner, “I have just been to your house, and I want to speak to you, to tell you—And yet,” she added, striking her dress passionately, “I don’t know how I am to begin



—or where—But you will grant me this one favour. I know—I am sure you will?”

The old complacent smile was rising on the Fermor lips. Passers-by, reading his face, thought what a pleasant little interview was going on at the window of that little brougham boudoir.

“Anything you wish,” he said. “You have only to ask. Come, what is it?”

“You don’t understand,” she said, in the same passionate way. “Something must be done, and done at once, or we know not what mischief may come. I am accountable for it all! I have been guilty and wicked; but I declare solemnly I knew not what I was doing. You will be generous, and save me, I know. Fly! leave this country! leave me. Put the seas between us. It is the only chance. And take *her* with you. She must not be sacrificed.”

He was amazed. “Put the seas between us,” he said. “And you ask me to do this?”

“I do! I do!” she said. “I would repair the mischief I have done. I should have kept away from your household, but some miserable fate has driven me on. I thought I was doing what was right; but I was blind—stone blind—and I was wicked, too. But you will go?”

(Other passers-by now looking in curiously, and seeing Pauline’s sparkling eyes, said within themselves, “Here is a gallant little quarrel going on in this public-private place.”)

He shook his head. There was a bewildered pleasure beaming in his eyes. "Anything but that," he said. "You can't ask me that. I could not do it. It is hard to ask me. Now, too, when we are beginning to know each other, and to *understand* each other."

"Ah, that is it!" she said, with a groan. "You don't understand me. No one does. No one knows what I am, or what I have been doing. I dare not even hint it to you. But I tell you, it is the only chance for me. You will go, will you not?"

Again the look of triumph was in his eye. "You know," he said, "my position. I am only a slave in that house. I can neither go nor stay. They bought me, and I must stand by the terms of the bargain."

She seemed to see this, and covered her face up in her hands. A man passing, who had read a good deal of French romance at his club, looked back with extraordinary interest, and thought it very like a scene in the "*Ames Perdus*," by Charles Loupgarou.

"Then we are lost," she said, despairingly, "all of us!" She told the coachman to drive on.

"Wait, wait," said he, hastily; "we shall see. We must talk of this—I must see you——"

"Think! Talk!" she said, angrily. "There

has been too much of *that*. We must *do* now—act. But it is all too late.”

Miss Manuel went home miserable, and almost distracted. In her drawing-room she flung herself on the sofa with her face to the cushions. “What *am* I to do?” she groaned. “Some curse is on me. Some fury is driving me onward.”

So it seemed, indeed. She was so bound up, so encompassed about. She could dare turn back. An iron fate, cruel and pitiless as ever was in a Greek tragedy, was hurrying her on. She thought of the soft suffering face of her lost sister, as it lay before her on that final Sunday morning.

“Fool that I was,” said Pauline, in a fresh agony, “wicked fool! to have thought that so sweet a soul could have required to be soothed or laid by savage and unchristian vengeance,” and she shuddered as she thought of the awful character of the retribution she had heaped on the head of that poor artless, impetuous, but innocent Mrs. Fermor. “What *is* to be done?” she said, distractedly. “Who is there to help me?” Who indeed! Not one in *that* house, not her brother, who was watching jealously, suspiciously, and now panting for prompter vengeance.

There was scarcely any equivoque here, such as takes place in a play, because Pauline could not bring herself to tell Fermor how she had been behaving to his wife. Nor, in fact, would she

have cared now, had she even suspected the view he took of her agitated requests. Every other consideration was sunk in the one aim and object—the undoing of what she had done. A skeleton in a cupboard! Here was a decaying, mouldering corpse, locked up decomposing, and mottled over with the black spots of a plague. Day and night she could not shut out the image of that pretty, impetuous, fresh young creature, whose ruin she had so craftily—“devilishly,” she said to herself—planned.

Motion—action was her only resource. At home there was no hope. Those gloomy eyes of her brother—now more gloomy and more truculent than ever—were upon her. They were suspicious, and brought her to account. Hanbury she saw again.

“What *can* you do for me?” she said, almost on her knees. “Help me! Save me! You once loved us, and loved *her*. O, *I* dare not tell you what I have done. You cannot guess it even, and you will not ask it. But you will help me—help her—save that poor child!”

In such wild accusations John Hanbury had no faith. She was one of his Saints. He thought long and wistfully of what he was to do.

“I would give the world,” he said, earnestly, “and not the world only—for *that* would be no sacrifice—but my blood, heart, life—everything for

you! But I am not quick at planning. If I saw her—that poor girl——”

“Ah, yes!” said Pauline, eagerly, “she will trust *you*, she will listen to *you*. Speak to her in your own natural honest way, and she will listen. She has not this horrible distrust of you, though, indeed, it is not her fault. It is only natural that she should shrink from me.”

“Ah!” said Hanbury, sadly, “if she only knew her interest, she would fly to you, she would——”

“No, no,” said she, hastily; “she is right there. You do not know me either. I am not a woman for the young and innocent to fly to.”

Hanbury’s eyes were turned on her, wondering and inquiring. This was the too-scrupulous self-accusation of his Saint.

“You will go to her,” went on Pauline. “Get them away—secretly; get them to leave this dreadful London. All of them—father, husband, all. It is the only chance. I know that wicked Romaine; his Will gives him power. He has done everything that he has laid out, and he has laid *this* out. Go quickly,” she said, hurriedly, and in terror, as if it might be already too late. “Persuade her. See her father. He wishes to leave this place. Conjure her, and she will heed you.”

John Hanbury left her, and, full of ardour, flew to carry out his new mission.

## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND.

## FERMOR'S NEXT MOVE.

Two approaching events were now mildly agitating the society of which Major Carter and Lady Laura Fermor were members. One was the marriage of the major with Mrs. Wrigley, the other, the festival Lady Laura was about to give. In conversation, the first was despatched with many sneers. Eyebrows were elevated together, with the accuracy of drill, as the subject was introduced. Webster, with his face to his plate and never sacrificing a mouthful to his joke, snapped off his sharp petards, and said he was glad of it, because now their united weight would break down the old chariot. Another time he said suddenly, when he was helping himself to truffles, "Carter and Mrs. Wrigley to be married! Marry a Mogul plum to

a stick of cinnamon!" Still there were not a few who growled, and who said "that Carter" was a "something" lucky fellow, that he had fallen on his legs, that he knew (satanically) well where a good thing was to be got, and how to get it, with more in the same key of approbation.

No wonder the latter was a little elated, the world was "going so pleasantly" with him. He was cleaner and crisper and brighter than before. The moment of his happiness was not ten days off. Lady Laura's festival was a day or two later, which he lamented much. "We shall be miles away," he said, half sadly, "by that time. We shall be at Dover, or perhaps at Calais. I am sorry to miss it; indeed I am." This he said to Fermor, whom he met in Pall-Mall. "The world," he went on, "has been going very well with me; better, indeed, than such an old sinner as I deserve. But the world is an old sinner too, my dear Fermor, and I suppose has some reason."

Fermor was in one of his fits of irritation. During these latter days he was in a strange excitement. He had just come from Miss Manuel's, where he had not been admitted. "Going pleasantly with you?" he said; "it is more than I can say. I am crossed and worried at every turn. Not but that, if I chose, I could be independent of it, and right myself."

The major laughed good humouredly. "We

poor genteel paupers must take what comes in our way, and be glad. But, my dear boy, to hear *you* railing at the world, with a goose full of golden eggs at home—ha! ha!—and yourself in the best society; and that charming, piquant Mrs. Fermor (I am an old fellow, you know, and may speak), why really——”

Fermor bit his lips several times before he could speak. “Charming and piquant!” he said, scornfully. “O, of course.”

“I declare I am so grieved,” went on the major, “at having to go, and at not being able to see her. She will make a genuine sensation. Mark, I say so—a succès éclatante.”

“Sensation! where?” said Fermor, absently.

“In the tableaux at Lady Laura’s. That rough fellow, Romaine, is at work night and day organising it.”

Fermor stopped short in the street and looked at the other. “Who told you this?” he said.

“The world,” said the major. “The town. Ah! my dear friend, I see! A little secret from the husband. A surprise on the night itself.”

“This is monstrous! this is outrageous!” he muttered.

The major’s face suddenly altered. “Forgive me,” he said; “I speak of these things too lightly. I did not mean it. Seriously, I *am* sorry about it. We are old friends, and I am an ‘old boy,’ as they



call me, so you won't mind me. But you know these young creatures are always a little giddy, until they settle down."

"What am I to do?" asked Fermor, walking on. "I think I shall go straight to that ruffian's house, and strike him across the face. I should like to mark him. His insolence is unendurable."

"He *is* overbearing," said the major, warmly, "and a low fellow. But, my dear Fermor, you must not do anything extravagant. There is really no harm in the business."

"No harm," said Fermor, fiercely, "in being talked of by the low gossips of the town, and being pointed at, and shrugged at? I won't stand it. I am putting up with too much. Everybody thinks they can treat me as they please. I tell you, since this marriage of mine, I have never had a day's comfort, and I believe I have to thank you and other good friends for it."

"Don't say that," said the major, calmly. "I think you do me injustice. A little reflection will show that you do. I put myself a good deal out of my way to help in that business; and, do you know, I trace a chronic rheumatism I have in this left arm to that cold night's journey up to London!"

Fermor was a little ashamed. "I know," he said, "and of course I did not mean——But it would have been better, after all, to have kept to

that poor girl. She would have adored me, I believe, and have made me very happy."

The major shook his head.

"Never would have done," he said. "That you know yourself. All very well for the romantic part; but otherwise——"

"Well, otherwise," said Fermor, impatiently. "Why not?"

"Society, I mean," said the major. "There's the droll thing of Miss Manuel, with her parties and her followers, and all the world—that is, a certain set of the world—struggling to get to them. But have you ever remarked, no ladies, eh?"

"Yes," said Fermor, "I have. But why not? She does not care for ladies."

"Ah! all very well," said the major, whose face was gradually contracting, and assuming a sharp and malicious expression. "That does to give out, you know. People find these things. She has taken some dislike to me, mainly, I believe, because I did conceive it to be my duty, in that affair of her sister's; and I cannot describe to you the unchristian attempts she has made to injure me. Thanks to Providence, I have been enabled to defeat them without much exertion. But of course I am under no obligation to cushion the thing, and when asked, therefore, I always tell the thing openly."

“But what thing?” said Fermor. “What do you mean?”

“Did I never tell you?” said the major. “No, I believe not. You never heard such a story, such a business altogether. You know I make no profession of being a friend of the Manuels. I always had the one opinion. I am, therefore, under no restraint. Such a disgraceful affair—very bad indeed! Let me see. The old colonel is in Town now. We are sure to find him, for he lives all day, and nearly all night, at his club. He would tell you the whole story in half an hour, and would like to tell it.”

“And I should like to hear it,” said Fermor, bitterly. “The Manuels give themselves great airs, and Miss Manuel, latterly, if she had been a princess, could not behave more haughtily.”

“Exactly,” said Major Carter, vindictively. “I don’t dislike her, though she has injured me; but then I am under no obligation to go out of my way to bolster up her family affairs;” and the major at that moment, thinking of Miss Manuel’s persecution of himself, and of his own trouble to defeat it, was actually colouring, and contorted in his face. “I will introduce you to Foley—you would like to know Foley—and *he* has heard of you.”

Major Carter, in a day or two, brought Fermor and Colonel Foley together, the latter of whom had

his sherry over again, and his abuse of the servants over again, and his "dammys" over again, and his stories over again.

"Would you believe," said Colonel Foley, winding up his narrative, "not two months ago I was going down a street, and who do you suppose I came full on, going up the steps of a house, but my Scotch doctor, Meadows—a very old Scotch doctor now, but stiff as ever. I never forget a figure, I can tell you. I picked out a fellow of ours in Liverpool one day, ten years, sir, after he had deserted from us. I did, upon my soul! It's all eye—every bit of it eye. And, sir, I went up straight to my Scotch doctor, and, dammy, if he didn't pretend not to know me!"

"Ha! very good," said the major, "very good indeed! Of course, naturally."

"Of course, naturally!" said the colonel, suddenly illuminating his Bologna cheeks with interior rage. "And wasn't it good of me to notice such a disreputable old broken-down scamp as that? He had his key in the latch, and he looked round at me with the most natural air in the world, and said something about 'having the advantage of him.' 'Advantage!' I said to him. 'By Jove, yes! and so had Manuel—a pretty good deal, I should say. You recollect those times, doctor?' A good hit, I say, but he brought it on himself—

dammy!" This strengthening tonic for the sentence he added after a short pause, as if he was a little doubtful about the propriety of his conduct; but it quite reassured him. "About more sherry—I don't know—what d'ye say?" This he addressed, as it were, with the pressure of hospitality, as though he had been treating handsomely all round, and all the time.

When they were in the street, the major found that he had forgotten one of his gloves, in his "old stupid way." "Just like me," he said, and went back hastily. He had left his glove, but as he took it, he said to the colonel carelessly, "Where was it that you met that doctor?"

The other told him. "Clarges-street—didn't I say so?"

"Ah, yes, to be sure. And on the right hand side, you said, too."

"Yes," said the colonel, gruffly.

The major joined his friend, and put his arm in his. "A most curious bit of history," he said; "just like a romance. But you see it bears out a little what I said."

Fermor's mind was on another view of the case. "So *she* dares to treat me in this lofty way. I can bring her to her senses now. This will level her a little."

"And that doctor, that stiff, grim, iron-looking

doctor," said the major, in a ruminating way, "with the daughter, now of course grown up, whom the colonel met in Clarges-street."

"Clarges-street," said Fermor, starting. "I wonder! Good gracious! such an idea occurs to me! Why, it *must* be the same."

"The same!" said the major, in astonishment.

"Yes, of course," said Fermor; "it quite tallies. The description—everything."

"I don't follow," said the major, hopelessly.

"Don't you see?" said Fermor, impatiently, "it is he—that Meadows is Carlay. Everything corresponds; I see it all. But I am not sorry. I am *not*, indeed. We must make more of this," he added, excitedly, "and find more out."

"Good gracious!" said the major, in unfeigned astonishment, "how you put two and two together. Wonderful! Wonderful!"

"I can see my way," said the other, with the old air of superiority. "But I am glad of it, very glad of it. They fancy they have me in their power; but I have *them*."

## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-THIRD.

## A WARNING ON A DOOR-STEP.

DURING these days Miss Manuel, in a strange state of mind, felt herself drawn in the smooth current on to the rapids. She seemed to be catching at the branches and stones as they passed her. It was of no avail. She went abroad to the shows and amusements, not from any love of such attractions, but because they might offer opportunities of undoing her fatal work. But it was going on too surely and rapidly. Once during these days she met Mrs. Fermor, and, with a wistful and imploring look, ran to her; but, trembling and flushed, the other turned from her. Much oftener she met her with Mr. Romaine—Romaine the Victorious. Him, at some ball or theatre one night, she caught hold of and talked to hurriedly.

“What do you mean to do?” said she. “How is this to end?”

“How can I tell?” he said, calmly. “You know me sufficiently by this time to guess that what I mean to-day may not be what I mean to-morrow. But this I am certain of: what I feel at this moment to that young girl.”

“But you have conscience—you have honour,” said she, almost frantically. “I cannot believe that you would go so far——”

“Ah, yes!” he said. “That is not the difficulty. I don’t care to boast, but I have lived stormily—according to the odd French expression, have had a jeunesse orageuse. I could count on my fingers certainly three or four instances nearly the same, and I knew what I meant then, and how far I intended to go. Apply that to the present instance. I am a hard, cold, selfish being, I confess it. For years I have not known what it is to live or love. Now, when I feel the rays of the sun upon me, you would push me into shade. Nonsense. My dear Miss Manuel, you are laughing at me—behind your cards—behind your fan. You threw down a clever challenge; you are beaten, and now you want to try another system. It will not do. I have but one thing in my head now, and I shall follow it out to the last, as I have done everything else in my life.”



She almost groaned. "O, Heaven help me, and forgive me! Heaven help *her*, as indeed it will!" But her rash purpose was being worked out without her, and in spite of her: the old wrong would find a punishment for itself, and would be, indeed, Never Forgotten.

These were weary miserable days. She lay under a load of remorse. All the time her strange brother kept her under his eye suspiciously. "What is this change?" he said. "You do not see people. Why do you not let them come? Why do you not see him as you used to do? Take care, Pauline; I am getting tired. I don't follow these fine schemes of yours." She felt that she dare not tell him what she knew, or dream even of changing his purpose; so she could only plead for delay, for a little longer time. "A week or two more," she said, "and you shall see. I conjure you do nothing of yourself. You promised, you know, to leave all to me."

"Ah, Romaine," said he, with some satisfaction, "*he* is doing his work. You have managed that well. I must give you so much credit. But Fermor, the guilty miserable creature, we are far too slow with him. I cannot bring my eyes to look at him when we meet. I find this growing on me every day. He is a standing reproach to me. You remember what you called him that night, when

she was still in the house—a murderer. It was the exact description, and now, go where I will, by night or by day, I always have him present to me as a murderer.”

Miss Manuel groaned to herself, and covered up her face. She was thinking how every step had plunged her deeper; every move had been but too fatally calculated to prevent her going back. The only course now was to prevent this wild excitable brother from taking things into his own hands; and she therefore, with a desperate hypocrisy, conjured, implored him to leave *all* to her.

But all this time there was a great manly heart bound up in the Manuel family by all the ties of strong grief, and tender regrets, and softest associations, and whose state was as miserable as that of Pauline herself. The tones and colouring of the younger Hanbury had faded with that deep trial and the schooling of rough travel; the old dream of the goodness of all men, and the unsuspecting trust, which at times looks like folly, had been scorched out. A graver, sadder, and more practical Hanbury had come home. Now it seemed to him that old wounds were opened afresh. Yet he knew not how to meet the evil. At devising he had no skill; yet one evening, relying on his own honest instincts for assistance, he thought he would go straight to the bright impulsive little woman, whom he always looked at with a strange sad

interest, from her having stepped into the place of one he could never forget.

He was coming down the street, when he saw Romaine standing on the steps, looking in his direction. Romaine waited for him. "My good Hanbury," he said, "I have an instinct you are coming in here. Am I right? I thought so. Now, what can you want in this galley? I give you fair notice I am come for a private audience, and you will only be in the way."

Hanbury said to him, sadly, "Ah! why do *you* come here? It is not prudent nor right. Surely you, who are in the world, know how the world talks. I know I have no title to speak to you, but——"

"Well," said Romaine, "you have saved me from some embarrassment by that speech; some such misty notion was in my head, but I was too polite to utter it. Seriously, my good friend Hanbury, what are you at on these hall-door steps? Only that I know you to be a good sort of well-meaning fellow that intends no harm, why really I should be inclined to——" and he nodded his head significantly. "But the point now is, I am going in here, and I trust you will have the good taste not to come in too."

"I say again," said Hanbury, firmly, "this should not go on. It is unworthy of you, Romaine—unworthy of any man of honour, especially when

you know the state of things in this house. Come away with me down, and let us talk over it quietly. Come."

The look of calm insolence that Romaine gave him was unsurpassed. "I am beginning to understand you, Mr. Hanbury; and it is time that you should understand me. Let me remind you that our acquaintance does not quite warrant this tone of confidential remonstrance. I once 'went out,' as it is called, with a benevolent Frenchman—a religious man, too—for a similar friendly remonstrance, which, not being a friend, he had no business to make. You understand. Religious man as he was he *did* meet me, and recollected it well afterwards."

"This sort of tone has no effect on me," said Hanbury; "I have been in situations where I have shown no regard for life. It has often been a burden to me. I want no quarrel with you; but I tell you plainly, this must not go on!"

"This is far more rational," said Romaine, good humouredly; "much better than the platitudes you began with. Now, I tell you it *shall* go on. That is, I shall take no interference."

"I shall find means," said Hanbury, looking up, "never fear! Too many hearts are interested in this young creature, to let her be lost without an effort."

"Ah!" said Romaine, "*now* we have it all. The good, faithful, well-meaning friend has let it

out! Well, go back to your employer, Mr. Hanbury, and tell her from me that it will not do. It has failed, and *will* fail. Her own persuasion was of no use, and intimidation will turn out equally profitable. There!" and he rang the bell. "I am quite serious in this! Look you, I shall be interfered with by no woman, and certainly by *no man*. Mind! And as you are a friend of the family, perhaps you will hint to them that if *this* becomes a matter of serious interference with my affairs, it may turn out rather a dangerous game for *them*! I know a good deal about most families, and what most families would not wish to be known! Just hint that to your friend, and, if you can recollect them, in those words. There!"

"Then," said John Hanbury, slowly, "you have quite decided you will do nothing?"

"Quite, my dear friend," he said, smiling; "you, at last, understand me, I see."

"What could that heavy creature mean?" thought Mr. Romaine. "He had a mulish look as he went away. I think he hinted that he would try and give me trouble. Dumpkoff, as the Germans say: a regular dumpkoff. Confound him!" he said, suddenly, "if he attempts any of his high moral interference with *me*, or, in his clumsy way, tries to give me any annoyance, I shall just *mash* his big figure into a pulp. Clumsy clown! I wonder I listened to his prosy rubbish so long!"

## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

## MR. ROMAINE AND HIS "NET."

THAT afternoon the little lady was keeping a lonely watch in her drawing-room. Since her marriage, her grim father had felt that he was not the same company for her that he was of old. Perhaps he did not like to chill her new existence—which had now, he supposed, been bound up with youth and pleasure—with the frost of age.

In all concerning her he had a sensitive delicacy. She took it, that he had devoted himself so long to her interests as a sort of sacrifice, and now that she had found a more suitable companion, was glad to be restored to his books. She was sitting there alone, neither reading, nor writing, nor working, but simply thinking. Now in a hopeless dejection; now lashing her little soul into fury, with dwelling on what she thought her wrongs. She was deter-

mined to die sooner than "give in." Her dress—the dress of Laura—which she was to play to Mr. Romaine's Petrarch, had come home not an hour ago, and lay upon a sofa near her. Madame Gay, who had come in person to see the effect, and to lay on "a touch" here and there, was in French ecstasies at the result. It was magnificent, divine, "ravishing." Madame took away the light of her eyes! "And monsieur—Monsieur Romaine"—added Madame Gay, with a "fin" air, and a recollection of her Paris training—"how *he* will be pleased!"

Mrs. Fermor coloured. She was not skilful at the right reply or at the right manner. "He has brought this humiliation on me!" she thought, meaning Fermor. "*He* exposes me to the remarks of such people as these."

Madame Gay saw the blush, and, still following her Paris instincts, took it for a blush of pleasure.

"Ah," she went on, "such a *gay*, gallant gentleman, and he admires madame so. *Il souffre*. I know it well. *Mon Dieu! comme il souffre.*"

Mrs. Fermor turned on her with flashing eyes.

"What do you mean?" she said. "You forget yourself. I don't want to hear such things. How dare you?" and she stamped her foot angrily.

Madame Gay was contrite and deeply penitent. "Elle me boudait," she said afterwards, telling the story to a lady of her own country.

“Ciel! comme elle me boudait. But all the time, elle s’y prenait bien, voyez vous. She is a charming little coquine.”

Presently the Frenchwoman, accepting this indignation as an invitation, came back to the subject.

“If I dared,” she said, “if madame would not be angry, I would tell her a little secret about this very dress. I will tell it in a little whisper. It is all paid for! M. Fairmore——”

With doubt, and eagerness, and pleasure in her eyes, Mrs. Fermor turned round hastily. “Yes,” she said; “go on. Tell me quick!”

Under the rich material of Laura’s dress a little reproach was working.

“M. Fairmore is not to know a word,” went on Madame Gay, with mystery. “It is a cadeau, a surprise from a true chevalier.”

“Take it off, take it off!” said Mrs. Fermor, hurriedly; “quick, quick! Don’t lose a moment;” and, to the astonishment of the Paris lady, she began tearing at the rich laces and ribbons of Laura’s dress.

“Madame will destroy it all,” said Madame Gay, distractedly, catching her arms. “Take care, for the love of God! There, that is better.”

“Go away,” said Mrs. Fermor, distractedly; “leave this house. Never come here again. Don’t pay me any of your horrible compliments.”



"Madame is ill," said the Frenchwoman, calmly. "Here is the eau-de-Cologne. I shall come to-morrow evening at the same hour."

When she was gone, Mrs. Fermor threw herself back in deep affliction. "*He* has brought this on me," she said; "my name will be in everybody's mouth. This dreadful woman will go round and tell her fine ladies! I shall be spoken of, pointed at, and I have no one to help or advise me. No, no, not one." Then she started up suddenly: "If the world thinks so—let it think so. It will wring his heart. He will know too late what he has lost. He is sensitive about being pointed at; so am I. When he shall see me admired, with all the world at my feet, with the great and the noble worshipping me, he will, perhaps, regret what he has lost." She walked to her glass. Laura's dress became her wonderfully. The excitement in her eyes and cheeks became her yet more. She walked before her glass. "Ah! It will do," she said.

"Indeed it will do," said a voice at the door; "it is superb and dazzling. Petrarch admires!"

"Go away," said she, in a frightened voice, going to the other room. "Why do you come here at this time? You should not—you know you should not. Go away—quick—I implore of you."

"If you act like that on *the* night," said Mr. Romaine, placing a chair for himself in the middle

of the room, "it will be the success of the season."

"You must go," she said, more excitedly, "or I shall ring, and send for some one."

"Hush!" he said, rising. "I am sure you are too sensible to make a noise, or bring in people from the streets, or do anything of that sort. No, no. Listen to me. I heard that the dress was to be home at this hour, and merely looked in to see the effect. I have seen it, and am going. There."

"Ah! the dress. Yes," said Mrs. Fermor, more excitedly still. "I shall never put it on again," repeated Mrs. Fermor, passionately. "Never!"

"That would be foolish," said he, calmly, "at now three-quarters past the eleventh hour. I had no idea the effect would be so good. Let us be rational. You are displeased, and I believe you are right. I am hasty sometimes. I shall go and get my money back from that French creature, and you shall pay her." This was reasonable, and Mrs. Fermor had no answer ready. He went on: "A charming dress—(I am really going now). And all my design, recollect. Why, that wandering husband of yours, when he sees you in it, will go down on his knees like a prodigal. I know these Orsons well. He will be your slave for the rest of his life. I have known many cases. Do you see my plan? Isn't it wonderful, in a wild ogre like me. But I want to do a little good before I die."

Mrs. Fermor sighed, and shook her head. "I don't know whether to believe you or not. I can trust no one now. He is too fond of the world," she said, "and I am too prosy for him."

"You talk of his indifference," he said, and went walking up and down. "I don't believe in it. He is acting a part; I know it. He is burning to love you, but his cursed pride is in the way. Else he must be the stupidest, vilest, most insensible block that ever came into this world. Else he has dull eyes. Else he is a mere savage and brute beast. Else he is so wrapped up in his own vanity and selfishness—his own utter heartlessness——"

"Mr. Romaine!" said she.

"No, my dear Mrs. Fermor," said he, in another voice, "trust me, a man of the world. You will see a marvellous change after *the* night. I am like the man on the branch sawing it away stupidly. Under the new régime, I shall, of course, be turned out, never admitted again. That I expect. It is always the case with me. I believe I must be going to die, I am getting so good. All my friends are cutting me. Good night."

He went away at once—went away singing and beating the rails down the street with his stick. "Poor little soul!" he said; "how she lets the net wrap round and round her again."

## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

## A REMONSTRANCE.

WE are now hurrying on to a crisis. It was better, indeed, that it should come to a crisis; for the demoralisation in the Fermor household was growing day by day. With such cold defiance, such quick temper, on both sides, it was not improbable that, to gain an advantage in the struggle, and secure a humiliation for an antagonist, one or other might forget decency, and make a confidant of that cruel gossip, the Public.

One night, Fermor, just going out, was summoned down to see a gentleman "in the hall." He came down impatiently, with the words, "I am busy. I really have no time now," on his lips.

It was Hanbury. "Well," said he, coldly to him. "What is it *now*?"

"Can I speak to you?" said the other, earnestly; "five minutes is all I want. It is about yourself, too."

The servant was standing by, and hindered Fermor's ready and angry answer.

"Go down, sir," he said. "What are you waiting there for?"

"Come in here a moment," said Hanbury; "I will not detain you. It is something that you should know."

"Now," said Fermor, as he closed the door, "I thought, on the last occasion, I had made myself understood. If this is on the same topic——"

"It *is* on the same topic," said Hanbury, firmly. "It is not for me to mind how you take it. To-day I have heard something which it is right you should know. Something which it would be a crime to conceal!"

This word stopped something in the nature of a protest against "interference."

"Ah, Fermor, get rid of this wretched sensitiveness, this terrible pride, which is destroying you. What infatuation is this that prevents you from listening to those who mean well, and would do you no harm? I *must* speak plainly to you; especially as I must tell you that the world is speaking plainly of you, and is busy with your

name and affairs. O, Fermor, *do* listen to me now, without any of this absurd feeling. It is my friend who speaks to you."

This tone actually took Fermor's breath away — He had no reply to make.

"It is about Romaine and—Mrs. Fermor," he said. "It should be looked to at once. I will tell you what occurred to-day. I was at our club, looking over a paper (though I don't care much for news), and there was a lot of young fellows about an old red-faced officer who was telling them stories. I heard the name of Romaine, and could not help listening. The old man was telling them some of his horrible old stories, and lamenting what he called the 'decay of fellows' at this day, and said that Romaine was the only man that had a spark of 'pluck.' And then one of the young fellows, whom I knew a little—and think of this, Fermor, in a public room!—laughed, and said that he knew what he was after, and that in a short time—You can guess, Fermor. And the old man laughed and enjoyed it. O, Fermor, you would not take my advice! I warned you in time."

The feeling in Fermor's heart was still not mortification, but anger, bitter anger, at one, a mere untrained fool like Hanbury, setting up to be wise and worldly. "You always come charged with good news," he said. "And how kind of my

friends there to allow my concerns to be spoken of in a public place that way. I suppose *that* was friendly, eh?"

He had *now* caught Hanbury.

"I knew the man," said Hanbury, calmly, "and I went up to him, and asked him, before the others, had he authority for what he said, or did he merely repeat what he heard? He said it was merely a vulgar Town story that 'some fellow' had told. I said that I knew both Romaine and you and the lady, that the whole was perfectly false from beginning to end, and that I knew it, and had opportunities of knowing. That Mr. Romaine was a friend—alone in the world with few friends—and that it was cruel and wicked to put such a construction on what was only good nature and kindness." (John Hanbury did not tell all he had really said or done, or how calmly and temperately he had brought the "young fellow" to account before the rest. How he had quietly asked him, was he sure about his information, and did he think it right to bring a mere vulgar rumour like that to the public room, and injure an innocent young girl in that way? "For my part," said John Hanbury, "I know *all* the parties, and see them almost every day, and I say the whole thing is false—false in every particular; and I am sure after this you will not repeat it any more." The "young fellow," who had not yet lost the virgin bloom of youth,

nor had learnt to consider Reputations to be mere low delf figures, with which he could play at "knocks" and "smash" at so many shots for a penny, became a little ashamed, and said he was sure it was a mistake. But the old colonel looked on with disgust, and repeated, that though he knew nothing of the parties, he was "cursed" sure it was no mistake, and that every one of "the lot"—meaning ladies—were "skittish," and "up to *that* game," if you only "knew how to take them, dammy!")

But Fermor, as he listened, grew furious. "And do you mean to tell me you did this—made me and her the talk of a coffee-room? It will be all over the town! I tell you, I don't want this championship, or patronage either."

"Patronage!" said John Hanbury.

"I don't, I tell you!" the other went on, with increasing excitement. "I suppose it is well-meaning, and all that sort of thing. But I don't want it. I wish to God you would leave me and my concerns alone. I don't want any man to be defending my wife in coffee-rooms."

"But can you wonder at other people," said Hanbury, quietly, "when you do not seem to care to do it yourself? Surely when you, who should naturally protect and watch over her——"

"That is my concern," said Fermor, "*quite* my



concern. Upon my word, it is coming to a pretty pass——But I must now request——”

“I am astonished,” said Hanbury, “I am shocked. I could not believe it of you. Such utter and miserable infatuation. It is charitable to suppose you do not see the danger. It is coming nearer every moment. What do you suppose is *my* concern in this matter? Do you fancy if it were any one else I should expose myself to what might be said? Ah, I may not tell you all. But there is one to whose name I am bound for life, in whom all that I can do or live for is centred. You know who that is as well as I. She has appointed me to this task. Her heart is set on it. And through me she tells you, fly, fly from this place, from this country, and take that poor girl with you. It is the only chance!”

During this speech, wonder, almost stupefaction, and rage, succeeded each other in Fermor. Wonder at the superior tone and weight Hanbury was assuming; stupefaction at the message he brought; and, finally, rage at the confidence and undertaking it implied.

“I am very glad you tell me this,” he said, with trembling lips. “That shows me how I can trust the rest of your advice. Miss Manuel—think of such a thing!—send *me* such a message, and by *you!*” He laughed aloud at the notion. “My

good Hanbury, don't come advising me again. *Fly indeed!* You don't know the world, I can see very clearly."

"I tell you it *is* so, on my word of honour," said the other. "She loves Mrs. Fermor. She would help and save her. Listen to me, listen to *her*, Fermor. Only yesterday she conjured me to persuade you. She would give the world that you would go away, and take her advice. Do! I implore of you, Fermor."

"How little you know," said Fermor, struggling with the superiority. "Poor Hanbury. Women can easily persuade you. Ah, my good friend, in time you will come to learn that there is more meaning behind what women say than what *you* would fancy. Often the very contrary to what they say. Well, Hanbury, you are not QUITE in her councils, *I* can tell you." (The opportunity was overpowering, and could not be resisted. He went on :) "I only say this much: she has her reasons, of course, for speaking to you; but, I can tell you, I am about the last person in Town she would wish to leave it."

The triumph in his eye was so intelligible, the flush of vanity to his face so marked, and the miserable egotism of the man so naked, that the whole truth came upon Hanbury like an inspiration. He started back, as though some one had

suddenly whispered in his ear, "That weak, blinded Fermor believes Miss Manuel to be in love with him."

"O, Fermor!" he exclaimed, almost with contempt, "to see you sunk so low as this!"

Fermor coloured.

"You are indeed blind," Hanbury went on. "I was not prepared for *this*. I now see it is hopeless. It explains all. Be a man! Get rid of these delusions! It is laughable. She who so lived for and loved that sister! Why, if there was one whom she should dislike and punish, and whom, indeed, I *know* she——But forgive me. I am speaking for your good, you know."

Fermor's fury and mortification combined were now at their height. "You come to insult me," he said. "I don't want you. Don't interfere in my concerns again; I shall take it up seriously, if you do. It is going too far. Never interfere with me again. I warn you."

"Very well," said Hanbury, sadly; "you must take your course. I *now* see it all. It is the old infatuation, and you are scarcely accountable. You shall not offend me, Fermor, and I shall help you yet, in spite of yourself."

Fermor was left in a state scarcely to be described. It was the insufferable air of patronage and of superior information and wisdom that

galled him more than anything in the world, and, above all, that sort of privity with Miss Manuel. For the first time, too, an uneasy suspicion flashed upon him as to there being some truth in what that "stupid, lumbering, blundering fellow" had hinted.

From this moment, a bitter, fretful desire entered into Fermor to meet with Romaine and quarrel with him. This was indeed but a disguise for that wish to punish some one for the mortifications that were being heaped on him. Fighting was exploded, and not to be dreamed of; and he knew very well that the cool Romaine would not suffer it to come to that. So he racked his brains to discover some way by which he could effectually outrage and insult him. In this mood, he unluckily came face to face with Mrs. Fermor. Here was the opportunity. She was the Christian thrown to the lion. *She* was not a cold, skilled hand that could retort upon him or repulse him. At the sight of her, the lecture he had suffered, the mortifications, the suspicions about Miss Manuel, all came rushing on him. Here was a fit whipping-post ready to his hand.

She was in a gentle humour. The sense of her loneliness, and the feeling of desertion, was growing upon her. Perhaps, after all, she had been thinking, she had not been making allowance. Perhaps,

with a little advance——But Fermor burst on her: “It seems we are now the talk of clubs and coffee-rooms, and strange gentlemen take up the cudgels for you good naturedly, and say you mean no harm. Cheerful news, eh? However, *that* is no matter, as it will all soon end—*must* end.”

This made her as defiant as he was; as wounded, as rebellious, perhaps as vindictive. “As soon as you please,” she said; “perhaps sooner. Do you wish the servants to hear as well as the gentlemen in the clubs?”

“This tone won’t do,” said Fermor, with a trembling voice. “I’ve had too much of it. Most luckily, it is not too late.”

During this speech Mrs. Fermor had thought of a famous retort. She would not have repressed it for the world. “I am glad,” she said, her little heart beating fast, “that there *are* gentlemen who take up my cause, and have remarked the treatment I am subject to. I am *very* glad.”

“Gentlemen or no gentlemen,” said he, with a heart beating as fast, “these goings on must be stopped, and stopped promptly. As a beginning, I require peremptorily that you do not exhibit yourself at this foolish show of Lady Laura’s. In fact, I shall take good care that you do not go.”

“And what if I *do* go?” said Mrs. Fermor, with sparkling eyes.

"We shall see," said Fermor, scornfully.

"And we *shall* see," repeated Mrs. Fermor, as scornfully.

Yet only a few minutes before, during that interval of softness, she was thinking whether, after all, it would not be better to go to him and make this little sacrifice, as a sort of opening to reconciliation. But now that was all over for ever and ever. If she was to *die*, she would go.

## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

## FOWLER AND BIRD.

POOR Mrs. Fermor! All helpless, and cast entirely among "gentlemen friends," she had no one to rely upon or look to for aid or counsel. Men, after all, with their free manners, were *true* beings. Not so faithless, she thought, as women. A hot spirit was working in her veins, a strange excitement, and pride was carrying her forward in this path. She had no time to think. Everything seemed to conspire cruelly to hurry her into that crooked course. Thus she gave directions that Mr. Romaine was not to be let in; for she had begun to shrink from the calm, collected air of direction and authority which he had latterly begun to assume. When he sauntered up the stairs, in defiance of these orders, her face flushed,

and she drew back. "I am not at home," ~~he~~ he said, excitedly. "I don't want to see people. I said that you were not to come in. You must go."

"A girl feebly tried to stop me," he said, "but I saw the lie on her lips. Surely I know that you are always at home at this hour. What is the use of this little artifice with *me*?"

"It is very wrong," she went on, passionately, for she felt her own helplessness. "You think you can do as you please here. I won't permit it," she added, with a little stamp; "you come here too often, and I have told you so."

"Perhaps so!" he said, looking at her with genuine astonishment, as it seemed to her. "I am sure I do. I must try and mend, though. You tell us these harsh truths a little roughly. You should break the fall, and prepare us. Last day you were kinder. Well! it is only one more like all the rest!" And, taking his hat again, added, "Good-by."

There was such a wounded hurt air in his manner, that her heart smote her a little.

"I always say more than I mean," she said. "I have no choice of words. *You* understand me, I know. I am worried and miserable. No one stands by me, or, I believe, cares for me now."

"A discovery!" he said, bitterly. "But that is the old song from the beginning of the world. Who



cares for me, I should like to know? Who has ever cared? I have given up looking for *that* sort of article. Only I *did* suppose," he went on, excitedly, "like one of the great dolts which all men are, that *you* had a sort of toleration for me—a good nature, a sympathy for the poor rough creature who has had his troubles, and whom you encouraged, I say, for some purpose of your own, into a dream that there was something like heart left on the earth. For a moment I believed in you, Mrs. Fermor! I supposed that you would not descend to the tricks and deceits of other women."

"Tricks and deceits?" she repeated. "O no."

"Using me," he went on, more excitedly still, "for the virtuous end of stirring up the slumbering fires of *his* affection. I see. O, of course," he said, "I am taking a liberty in making these speeches. But it is the truth."

"You do me injustice, indeed you do," she said. "I never dreamed of such a thing."

She felt, in penitential confusion, that she had behaved harshly—coarsely even. She would have done anything for an opportunity to show how sorry she was. "Sit down," she said, "won't you? If you go away at once, I shall know that you are offended."

"Offended?" he said. "No. It is more in

sorrow than in anger—as men go away in the novels. And yet I don't know what to make of you," he said, sitting down. "I ought to go. And with it all I *don't* hate you, as I ought to."

She laughed and tossed her head, as any other woman, the most prudish, might have done in the same case.

"I have no sense," he said, impatiently. "I have an odd stupid notion, or have dreamt it, that you are a *little* like myself: that you find that no one understands you, no one cares for you; that you are alone on an iceberg. It is a mere fancy, but it is in my head. No matter whether it be true or not." Mrs. Fermor sighed. "Well, I came to-night, merely because I heard that you were going—going at once. My sin was coming to say good-by."

"I—we—never thought of going," said Mrs. Fermor, wondering. "Who told you?"

"Well; one who is supposed to be a very great friend of yours and of mine—Miss Manuel. She was very eager about it, and wished me to persuade you to go. Why, I wonder?"

"Why?" said Mrs. Fermor, suddenly flashing out. "Ah! *you* can't guess; but there is a reason for all these things."

"It is a good reason, I suppose?" he said.

"Is it?" said she. "Ah, you who know the world so well have much to learn; and so have I.

O," she said, almost crying, "I don't know where to turn to. Every hour brings out some new treachery."

"Exactly," said he, quietly. "We are wonderfully like, I see. Just what I find. But, dear Mrs. Fermor, it grieves me to see you in this way; you who are so young, and fresh, and fair, and who ought to be very happy. I can't be acting shams; I don't care to take the trouble. I tell you plainly I have seen that there is trouble on your mind which I may help. Forgive me, if I say what I should not say, and give me but a hint, and I stop. But where I have a deep, earnest, and sincere interest in one who so brusquely turns me into the street——"

"I do indeed believe you to be a friend," said she, piteously. "And I should be ungracious if I did not understand your good will; but——"

"Now," said Romaine, drawing his chair closer, "I see most things, and where I don't see, I have an instinct. There is Fermor, your husband—— May I go on?"

She looked at him irresolutely, and tried to call up her faithless pride, which was hurrying away to the rear. "I think on this subject——"

"Exactly," he said, pushing his chair away again. "I knew it. Poor Romaine! he is always going through the ice."

“O, go on,” she said, a little fretfully; “tell me what you mean.”

“Well,” he said, gravely, “Fermor, our friend, your husband—a good deal of allowance is to be made for him. He was a beau garçon once. His head was turned. (Don’t be angry.) He has been humoured—perhaps spoiled. This I mean in his relation to the common world outside, walking the streets. Well, he treats that world with some airs, and how is that world curing him? How do you suppose? By leaving him altogether to himself. The treatment has already had a wholesome effect. It will do him good; it will soften him in time. You see, the world is the best mistress in the world. You could not, my dear Mrs. Fermor, go to a better school.”

She looked at him wondering, yet comprehending perfectly.

“Ah, my dear Mrs. Fermor,” he went on, eagerly, “we are all too much humoured—we men, I mean. You, I fear, are an angel of sweetness”—she started—“women, I mean. It does us no good. The more we get, the more we want. We are not a bit obliged for the homage. There is some vile, overbearing dross in us. Keep us at the grinding-stone, and we love you all the same. The sweet suffering wife is only a drudge, and *made* a drudge.”

She looked at him still with dilated eyes, but

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his words brought conviction. A new light had flashed upon her. Long after he had gone, she sat pondering on them. At last she said aloud, "How rude and brutal I was to him, and how gently he bore my pettishness. I begin to think he *is* my only friend in this world. And all he says is so sensible."

Never was she so confirmed in her resolution of "dying first" before giving up going to Lady Laura's.

**CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.****A BRAVE STRUGGLE.**

LADY LAURA'S festival was now fast hurrying on. Once she had determined on it, she went to the task with truly Spartan energy. And, indeed, there was much to encourage her. Though her worn and jaded limbs tottered as she struggled up the steep and stony mountains, still she flourished up on her poor old shoulder a banner with the device of *Excelsior*. She seemed to force on events by her indomitable will. And it had actually come to pass just a few nights before at old Lady Tozer's, that Young Spendlesham, arriving about one A.M., very pink and dewy about his face, and very rich and thick about his speech, and full of kindness and good will to all men and women in his sentiments, had fallen into the meshes

of a Calypso, who had been looking out for him for hours, and had been led away to her island—a greenhouse upon the stairs—where he long sat in a wine-y rapture. Sometimes Calypso made as though she would seek Calypso's mamma, but was checked by Ulysses, who, in his deep rich voice, said, "Don't go yet;" or, with deep and burning reproach, "You w-ant to go—you d-oo—you know you do—wharserfellarsname?" conveying indistinctly that he dreaded the influence of a rival. On which the gentle Calypso began to pry curiously into the joinings of her fan, and asked with gentle suffering where had *he* been all the night? On which Ulysses began to protest hotly, "Nownedeed! But *you*—you want to go—I knowte—Issashame, I say! Tell me now—wharserfellarsname—I mean," he added, correcting himself, "wharserullerfellarsname? No, no," he added, gloomily, "you won't tell me, I know you won't!"

Later, an hour later, Calypso whispered softly to her mamma, and the worn lines of mamma's face were lit with a flush of hope. She had laboured through the heats, and had quarried iron rocks, and had found what had repaid her. She hurried at once to secure the young lord. She took him captive, wisely and warily, on the spot. "I am so glad," she whispered to him. "This is a happy moment for me. The happiest moment of my life." Had she been at all familiar with Holy

Writ, she would have quoted *Nunc dimittis*. And then she led him to this person and to that, and exhibited her prize. "Lady Tozer," she said, "you know Lord Spendlesham; Blanche and he have been settling something together. Most suitable in *every* respect," she whispered. My lord, still dewy—about as rich and thick in his voice as curaçoa—and swinging back and forward to the banister, as if preparing for a spring, said something about a "sharmigirl." Lady Laura kept to him fast, and went through the rooms, dragging him at her car, so that presently everybody, including some safe business-like friends, became acquainted with the joyful news that young Spendlesham had proposed for that second Fermor girl.

Thus inspired, Lady Laura toiled up the heights with renewed energy. Was she at all mortal, or did she find sleep or support from such things as breakfasts and dinners, from meats or wines? Night and day it was all one; she worked and toiled with head, heart, and hands. She should have been a general in the field. She found everything; she thought of everything; for Blanche and her sister were poor helpless creatures. Yet at this time the tradesmen and tradeswomen were coming thick and fast to the door; were pressing and loud voiced; and, once in the hall, refused to depart without audience. The jobmaster was heard below, turbulent and insolent.



Lady Laura, above in her bedroom—where a “cheap Dorcas woman” was at work under superintendence, and where her own worn fingers laboured at tulle and silk—came down courageously and calmly to meet these rude Troopers. The job-master she worsted easily; with him she took the high tone. She whipped him across the face with “My daughter’s marriage with Lord Spendlesham.” “His lordship,” she said, “will be mounting his establishment when he returns from his wedding tour, and I should like to have mentioned your name to him. He will want hunters and carriage-horses, and all sorts of things. But now you have been so troublesome to me, that really,” said Lady Laura, smiling, “I don’t see how I can reasonably mention you to him.” The job-master was repentant in a moment. “You see ’ow it is, my lady,” he said; “we as keeps ’orses find it very ’ard to make the thing go.” And then he said it was of no consequence, and retired.

With Madame Adelaide her encounter was of a different nature. That shrill and feline milliner had taken off her gloves, which every Frenchwoman wears to hide claws, and had long since been “spitting” and screaming at her debtor. She had dared to send an “Attorney’s letter” to Lady Laura. Lady Laura drove to her boldly in the job-master’s carriage, and courageously strode in to her den. “Where is madame?” she said to the

neat Phyllises who were scattered among the bonnets and "dummies." "Send her here, please."

Madame came, with the feline tusks displayed, and the whiskers almost visible. "I have received *this*," said Lady Laura, showing the letter. "I shall take no notice of it whatever. You have injured yourself more than you fancy. My daughter shall not get so much as a bonnet for her trousseau from you."

"I do not care," said the milliner, "but you shall pay me all de same."

"At my convenience," said Lady Laura. "I have it here," she said, showing some notes, "but you shall wait. I shall take care that my daughter, who is to marry Lord Spendlesham, shall not deal with you. I have shown Lady John Villiers *this*, and she says it is outrageous. If I was to tell this generally, I could ruin you."

Lady Laura drove away—in the job-master's carriage—again victorious. The milliner made a degrading submission. She found money, too, did Lady Laura, just as skilful spendthrifts find money, and perhaps in the same way. She may have been to a dirty snuffy Jew in a dirty snuffy back parlour, and have raised it on a bill, as well as the clever spendthrift. She may have taken her grandmother's heavy silver teapot and sugar bowl under her cloak, and gone down a remote street in the City, to a silversmith where such

things were bought, and where she would have made a good bargain and got more money than another man or woman. There were old diamond earrings, too, which her father had given her when she was a girl, centuries ago, when there were such things for her in the world as affections, and sympathy, and associations, and hearts, before the frosts of fashion had set in and killed every plant and flower. When she took these trophies out of their worn velvet-lined case, something like a faint breath of warmth and softness seemed to come out with them. She handled them with reverence. These, it was well remembered, disappeared about this time.

Workmen were in the house, busy in the drawing-rooms constructing a stage, under Mr. Romaine's superintendence. Fine scenery was being painted, musicians were secured to play suitable music, and the light green vans of Deval, the well-known monopolist pastrycook, had been seen occasionally at the door. These splendid auxiliaries happily required no ready money. The coming alliance, belled about in the fashionable papers, was accepted as a note of hand, and readily discounted. Madame Adelaide, deeply repentant, was permitted, at her own urgent entreaty, to prepare a gorgeous fancy dress of richest texture and materials, to set off Blanche's charms. The house was in possession of visitors and strangers all day

long. It was upside down, topsy-turvy, on its side. There was no breakfast, no dinner, in regular fashion. Nor did the relations with the servants—at all times peculiarly delicate—permit of any despotic manners. It was understood, however, that they too were to share in the general largess that was approaching, and during the interval suspended all hostile action. Wonderful old Spartan! she controlled everything, and found everything, and thought of everything, and brought everything gradually into shape. There are many such wives, widows, and martyrs, labouring about us, who do more in their own way than the most slaving lawyer who ever struggled to earn his bread, or to become Attorney-General and Chancellor.

## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-EIGHTH.

## A WARNING.

THE eve of Major Carter's marriage had now arrived. A few stray questions had come, like "dropping shots," from a few inquisitive persons. That awkward and ugly challenge, "Who is he?" was of course varied; some putting it in this form: "Who the deuce is he?" "Who the d—l is this Carter?" But the replies were satisfactory always; and, better than all, Carter was seen quartered with Sir John Westende, that baronet leaning on his arm. A respectable and even brilliant company had been asked, and really secured by the major's exertions, to do honour to his nuptials.

The universal feeling about Mrs. Wrigley was, that she was making "a wretched old fool of herself;" but that about the major was as though he

had performed a clever feat, like one who had made a successful adventure in cotton or indigos, or had happily run a blockade. "Of course he'll choke off the poor old soul after a time," said Colonel Foley, in a spirit of rude jest, and leaning both hands on his stick, as if it were a spade. "Carter is a little impatient, *deu-side-ly* impatient, I can tell you, and will not wait long for any man—or woman either."

The major was coming home that afternoon, looking down on the flags with a complacent smile of pleasure—for he had happily made sure of a young lord out of a cavalry regiment, who would be as good as a pine-apple for the feast—when he happened to pass near the top of the street, where the Irrefragable had its office. He thought that as he was now going away on this delightful wedding—beginning a new life, as it were—he might as well give them a last injunction. He walked in and put his usual question, gaily adding, that he supposed he would be paid some day—say about the time of the final redemption of the National Debt—come now? Mr. Speedy had not yet returned, but would most likely be home the day after to-morrow. "And *then*," added Mr. Speedy's locum tenens, "you shall hear from us."

"You must direct, then," said the major, still gaily, "to the Great Hotel in Paris, or to the Iles Britanniques at Rome; and I declare I had rather

you would not, for I don't want to be worried with business *now*. You don't know, perhaps, that I am going to be married to-morrow morning? We go across to Calais to-morrow night."

"You *do*?" said the locum tenens, astonished. And there was a general up-turning of faces in the office.

When Major Carter left it, his reflection was the old reflection—how ready the world is to do homage to what is flourishing *in* the world. The manner of these fellows "is quite changed to me," he said, "now that they see I am bettering myself."

In the office, the locum tenens said hastily to *his* deputy, "We must have Speedy back at once!" And in a few seconds the messenger was hurrying to the telegraphic-office with a written scrap of paper.

Still smiling, and still moralising on this "cringing" character of the world, the major walked on towards the fashionable quarter. He was painting in for himself this breakfast on the next morning, with the fashionable faces he had secured to grace it. He was reading, in anticipation, the fashionable journal of the day after, and its select list. He grew soft and tender over himself, as he thought of the battle of life he had fought, and fought so successfully. "I had only myself to help me," he said, looking

back. "I had to fight my own way, and I think I have done very fairly. Always been with the best, and have done them no discredit. This is not so bad a finish." He was still smiling to the flags as he walked, when a carriage, which had passed him, stopped suddenly, and a lady called to him. The major's fingers went to his hat by a sort of instinct.

Miss Manuel had been driving here and there, in fact, she knew not whither, still pursued by the eager wish to do something towards stopping the great evil. She suddenly saw Major Carter smiling to the flags (and sometimes tapping them playfully with his stick), when the thought flashed upon her, "This poor wretch! I have been labouring to do him mischief. At this moment judgment may be gathering over his head. He is unworthy of serious punishment for what he has done to *us*—at least others may hunt him down if they will—and a word to him will be no harm."

The major's smile passed away as he saw who it was. So, *she* was also of that world who came cringing to him as his prospects brightened! But the game *she* had played with him was too serious, to be condoned so readily.

"Major Carter," she said, "I have just stopped to tell you something. I know all sorts of people, and hear all sorts of things. I am told that you are about being married one of these days.



Let me advise you—look carefully to yourself. There are dangers that perhaps you have not thought of. Do not think of marriages, or such things. I confess I am no friend of yours, but still I give you this friendly warning.”

For a second a shade of anxiety and alarm came into his face. Then it was all clear, and he laughed.

“I know that you are no friend of mine, Miss Manuel,” he said. “But I can’t be angry with you. You are very clever. I really admire you. But I am not angry with you. We have had our little game out, and it is not for me to say who has been the winner. But you are welcome to the title, with all my heart. I am in good humour with all the world to-night. So, thanks, a thousand thanks, for your very melodramatic warning.”

He was indeed in good humour that evening. As he walked away, he was greatly amused. “What a clever creature,” he thought, “and how well she did it. For the moment she almost took me in. Another man would have been frightened, and perhaps listened to her. Her last move has failed. I should not be surprised if she went mad one of these days.”

## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-NINTH.

### MAJOR CARTER'S WEDDING-DAY.

THE following morning—the day of the Carter wedding—was a bright one, with plenty of sun. There was great flash and bustle in the little square where Major Carter lived. Nearly every one round knew of the solemnity. Many were at the windows, and a few on the steps. A series of expresses seemed to be flying backwards and forwards between the major's house and other quarters. He himself, bright and shining as a new suit and the very closest shaving and polishing could make him, was seen in glimpses and flashes, as it were, now flinging himself into a cab and disappearing, now dashing out of a cab on to the steps, into the house, as though he had come with a reprieve for a criminal.

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So with Mrs. Wrigley, the widow, on whose figure workwomen and maids had been at work from an early hour. She was in a sort of fat flutter and trepidation. As she said often, "the moment of her destiny was drawing on." They had invested her with the richest, stiffest, white satin, which was as inflexible as milled board, and dressed her in it, as though she were an idol. Her neighbours knew of it, and were out on *their* steps; and a great carriage—not the chariot, which was wanted for another purpose—waiting at the door, with a huge display of favours and ribbons, proclaimed through the street the general notion of Marriage.

She was presently at the church, where there was a block of carriages already, belonging to the gay company that Major Carter had so carefully recruited. It was a fine fashionable temple, where the thing was done in a highly fashionable way, and by a highly fashionable incumbent. Where the cushions showed the impressions of select elbows and select knees; and where the letters of the Commandments seemed to run indistinctly into the characters of the Court Guide. In such a temple the rite received extra solemnity; and the fashionable incumbent was "assisted" by the Rev. Alfred Hoblush. Thus, standing at the rails, in this atmosphere of Belgravian sanctity, with the crowd of ladies and gentlemen of good degree

looking on, Major Carter was united to his bride. The fashionable incumbent almost chanted the words of the rite, bleating them, as it were, plaintively; and to his song the work was accomplished.

It was a happy moment for the major. Bride and bridegroom came out together on the top of the little steps in the sort of little slum at the back of the fashionable temple. But many select rites had glorified the slum. Their carriage was there, and the crowd, who lived in the back lane, and whose life was to see marriages driving away in inexhaustible variety. The major and his bride, enshrined in this carriage as in a casket, drove away in a tumult of happiness.

At Mrs. Wrigley's mansion was the breakfast, and the company. Such a company! It did honour to the major's recruiting powers. It had cost him infinite pains and trouble. To some he had to give "bounties;" others, who might be called "bringers," he had to supply with "head-money;" but still there were the ranks full, and a goodly show. There was a nice leavening of aristocracy—Lord Puttenham, and the Honourable Mr. and Mrs. Brownbill, being present; there were some "nice girls," in that gay and glittering plumage which is only seen at weddings and flower-shows; there were officers for the nice girls, men whom Major Carter took pleasantly by the

arm or shoulder; there was "Old Foley," tightened almost to gasping; Young Brett; Lady Laura Fermor and her daughters, who had been persuaded to come with some pains. Young Spendlesham had agreed to come too, but, at the last moment, had sent a note with an excuse about important business. Many and many times did Lady Laura's eyes wander wistfully to the door.

The feast was sumptuous indeed. The arch-pastrycook had looked to it. Everything rich, or delicate, or costly, was spread out. The bride and bridegroom sat side by side. The fountains of champagne were flowing briskly, and faces framed in white bonnets began to acquire the heated flush which always attends on this morning feasting. It is a proud hour for Major Carter. He thinks again, as he looks down the table, and reciprocates the fat smile of his bride, how he has fought his way, single-handed, through life, without aid from any one, and is now ending so respectably.

Now we must have some speaking. It is rather a nuisance—perhaps a little old fashioned; but where Lord Puttenham has kindly expressed a wish to air his rhetoric, such considerations must be waived. He does it very neatly, and dryly—in chips, as it were. A little attempt at humour, which, we may be sure, is not allowed to miscarry. It was an "auspicious" day, he said. His friend

Carter, he was sure, had made a judicious choice. He was sure to make the lady he had selected happy, though his friend Carter, he must say, had one fault—he was one of the most unmusical men he had ever met with. (This allusion produced extraordinary merriment.) Yes, his friend Carter, he would do him that justice, did not know a crotchet from a quaver, though he sincerely hoped that in their married life there would be an absence of crotchets of a particular sort. (Roars and applause.) Perhaps that was the reason that he himself (Lord Puttenham) had never married—he was too musical. (Amusement.) The man who had not music in his soul, or would not appreciate a posthumous quartet of the immortal Beethoven's, he would say was fit for treason and stratagem, and all that sort of thing. Though he was quite sure that his friend Carter would not indulge in any stratagems as regards Mrs. Carter — (Great amusement) — whose health he would now propose, &c.

It was a happy moment, one to look back to, when Major Carter rose, with half a glass of champagne in his hand. His white crisp face was a little flushed with other half glasses. He was inclined to say, "God bless you all," many times over. At least, he thought he was affected. The image present to his mind was that of labouring through a hard life, and having now finally come

into a port of ease and quiet. This he expressed, Mrs. Carter looking up at him with the soft gelatine eyes. "I have fought my way," said Major Carter, with the half glass of champagne in his hand, "through difficulties. I am not ashamed of it. I have made friends for myself, and I hope and believe they are not ashamed of me. I have had troubles, and I am not sorry to have had them. It has shown me the value of friends—of such friends as I now see sitting round me. We are now going away," continued the major, "I and the lady whom I am proud to call my wife. But we shall return soon, I hope. We shall see—and enjoy, I trust—the pleasant seductions of foreign countries. We may stay a long time or a short time, according as we find it; but believe me," and the major's voice faltered a little, "whether long or short, we shall both look forward to the time when we shall return once more and meet——"

Just at this moment, when Major Carter was raising his champagne-glass again, Major Carter's son, who had not been missed at the feast, entered hastily, and hurried down the room, behind the chairs, to where his father was standing. This was an interruption. Every one looked at him, and saw in the son's face a strange and frightened expression. His father, thus checked rudely, and yet seeing that he was making for him, stopped, and looked angrily at him. Every one felt that

this was a most awkward gauche creature, and that the major was to be rather pitied.

In a second he was at his father's ear, and gave him a short whisper. "What?" said Major Carter, laying down his glass quickly. People at the end even seemed to be straining their ears to listen. The son repeated his agonised whisper. The major's head shot round suddenly to a door behind him. When it was seen again, the champagne flush was gone, and there was a twitching and spasm in the region about his lips.

A mixed company is quick at reading signs. "What the deuce is it?" said Lord Puttenham, putting up his eye-glass. "The man is ill, or has heard some bad news." Mrs. Wrigley, heaving in a fright, said anxiously, "O, what is it?"

The series of ghastly twitches that shot across the major's face were recollected long afterwards. So, too, was the worn and agonised face of his son. More terrible, too, was it when the major, steadying his face, as it were, by his hand, forced a smile, and brought out a few words.

"A little matter—am sure you will excuse me a moment—shall not be away long."

Again his head turned round to the door behind him—for there were two to the dining-room—and by this one dinners entered. The white bonnets—and the faces flushed with heat inside—began to turn to other white bonnets. Such do



not like any "unpleasantness." "Is it an illness?" it was asked; "or what is it?"

Major Carter had gone to that door behind him, opened it, but had shut it hastily, and seemed to put his foot against it. He hurried down the room to the other, that twitch in his face working all the time, and strange falterings coming from him, which seemed to say, "Back in a moment—so sorry—a little business." In a second he had shot through the folding-door at the end.

"Dammy!" said Colonel Foley, who had followed all his motions critically, addressing his neighbour, "it *must* be bailiffs!" The son with the miserable face followed him out.

Outside, in the street, the accustomed crowd were waiting—the carriages for the flushed faces, and the old-fashioned swinging chariot (the coach-box removed), with postilions and posters, to take away "the happy pair." The curious were expectant. It was known that "she" was an "old woman." Public sympathy was for *him*.

The gentlemen attached to the carriages were talking together in a group, and such of them as had canes leant on them.

Suddenly—about the time it was known that the major was addressing the company—a cab drove up, and two plain, blunt-looking men jumped out, hurried up the steps, but had rung the bell very quietly. As soon as the door was opened, they

had stepped in promptly, without telling their business, and one of them, taking hold of the handle, had shut the door to, himself, very quickly. The gentlemen outside with the canes assumed them to be connected with the feast. They asked for the major. The servants of the house were all about the hall, some at the door listening (with the freedom pardonable on such an occasion) to the major's speech.

The hard-working faithful son, who was up-stairs looking to the last preparations for his father's departure, came down to them. One of the hard, plain men, with a sort of tap on his arm, took him aside, and gave him a short whisper, finishing off the whisper with a sharp nod. The son gave a gasp and a half cry, and looked at them with a wild, stupid stare.

"Better *you* tell him," said the plain man, "than we—more decent of the two. Ah! two doors, I see."

And he walked down the passage to the door by which the dinners made their entrance.

On him had looked out for a second the white twitching face of the major. To the other, who waited in the hall, the white twitching face also presently showed itself.

"Now, now," it said, "what is this? At such a time, too! Really, most inconvenient! Now, take

care," said he, dropping his voice; "is there *no mistake?*"

"On my word, Major Carter, no," said the blunt man.

"Most inconvenient," said the other, rubbing his white fingers over and over each other. "At such a time, too. Come up-stairs with me to the drawing-room for a moment, will you?"

The two rough men agreed, and they went up; Major Carter, in his bright wedding finery, a little in front. Menial eyes wondered exceedingly. The hall door was now open, and the gentlemen on the steps (with the canes) looked in eagerly. There was quite a perspective of menial faces and canes. The two men and the major shut themselves in the drawing-room, and locked the doors.

A few minutes later, the son, with a miserable and despairing face, looked into the dining-room, where was the feast in all its magnificence, and the flushed faces, and he whispered to the person nearest, imploringly, "*Do* go away, and get them to go away. O, something terrible has happened!"

This was but a whisper, yet somehow every one in the room had an instinct of what was said. There was a sudden rustle of ladies rising, a sound as of chairs pushed back. Even the newly-made Mrs. Carter—in an agitation she had not

known for years—hurried to the door. The ladies fell back from her—the female public was outraged at having been seduced into this unpleasantness.

“But what is it?” said the young cavalry lord.  
“No one seems to know.”

“Bailiffs, as I hope to be saved,” said Old Foley.  
“I know the look of the thing. I remember Tommy Jackson, at a dinner he was giving to a few fellows——”

In a few moments, by some mysterious means, the word “Police” had got into the room. No one could tell how, for no one could know. Perhaps they read it in guilty characters on the miserable son’s face; perhaps it was in the air, and had forced itself on every one present. Then it was, *sauve qui peut*.

“Come, Blanche,” said Lady Laura, gathering up her skirts as if she were in the ward of a Fever Hospital. “Let us get away from this dreadful place. Good gracious! Never mind calling up the carriage—they will keep us hours—we can walk to it.” She was thinking of young Spendlesham.

At the door, the old chariot and the posters were waiting in stupid immobility. The news had not reached the crowd outside. But there was a perfect rout. The gentlemen with the canes were

busy. The carriages were plunging and converging to the door, while the old chariot stood waiting for its tenants, as if they were really to come out together. The crowd, thinking so too, gathered more and more on the steps, and looked eagerly into the hall.

They were never to come out together. Mrs. Wrigley was in her bedroom in fits, with a charitable lady or two trying to help her. One gentleman or two, whose sister or mother or wife had left a shawl or a parasol in the drawing-room, hurried up, and, trying the doors, found them locked.

Inside, the miserable Carter sat handcuffed between two officers. They were waiting—charitably—for the house to be cleared.

Finally, it *was* cleared. There were wild stories among the neighbours, and a small knot kept about the door for the rest of the day. In a short time arrived Mr. Speedy, who went in. Then the drawing-room doors were unlocked, and a cab called. Then the hall door was opened quickly and a short thin figure, with a white face, muffled in a great cloak, ran down the steps with a blunt man on each side, and got into the cab. "There he is!" said the little knot. There was no glowing list of fashionable company in the morning papers; but in the evening papers was to be read

for a penny an account of the whole. One called it "The Interrupted Wedding," another, the "Esclandre in Fashionable Life." It furnished abundant talk and discussion for a week, and every one who had luckily been at the breakfast was at a premium.

**CHAPTER THE THIRTIETH.****CASE AGAINST MAJOR CARTER.**

WHILE the hubbub goes on, and people are stopping each other in streets and clubs, asking, "I say, what's this business about Carter?" we may look back some weeks to that stormy night at Bangor, when young Doctor Jones was away, and Miss Manuel, like an avenging angel, sitting before the old man, who was crouching in his chair. She literally wrung the whole story from him in bits and patches.

First, he recollected Major Carter, with his wife, coming to the place, and had seen them walking about very often. She, he had noticed, was so quiet and white, and always had her timid eye fixed on the major, as if expecting something. Her voice was gentle, and she feared her husband.

The major very often, said the old man, came into the shop, and talked, and talked pleasantly too, but not so much to him. It was delightful to listen to him; he knew the world so well. He was above them all in this place—miles above them.

The old man's son had just then come home, and had begun to help in the business; and the major fancied him a good deal more than his father. *His* reverence for the major far exceeded that of the old man's. "He can do anything, that man," he often said to his father. "He could be prime minister. He can turn you and me round his finger. We are mere babies to him." As indeed they were. And with Dr. Watkyn, Major Carter sometimes took a walk, though in a private direction, for he was careful, and saving of his dignity. And young Dr. Watkyn was heard to say often, that he would to Heaven that man could stay for years in the place. His words were like gold.

Presently, Mrs. Carter, always ailing, began to become ill regularly, and the major became changed into the most devoted of nurses.

"I was brought to see her," said the old man, "and my son was brought too. And I will confess that, being accustomed only to the plain, intelligible sicknesses of our rough country people, and my son having much the same sort of experience, we could not make much of the matter.



The major had all the feeling in the world, and tried to help us as well as he could; but what could be made of a lady who was wasting and wasting, and growing sick, and then growing well, and then wasting again? We could only call it consumption. At last, on one Sunday night, when we had been at meeting—Must I tell you?”

Miss Manuel, with her eyes on the coals, said, impassively, “Go on.”

Those Welsh coals, long undermined like a little quarry, suddenly crumbled down and made him start. “Go on,” she said again. “Finish.”

“Ah, begin, you should say,” he replied, “for it is all to come yet. That night I had been rummaging among our old jars and drugs, looking for some calomel, and found, as you have often found, perhaps, a heap of things that I had no idea I had. As I was rummaging and dusting, the major came in and sat down despondingly upon a chair. ‘Worse to-night, Jones,’ he said. ‘Only think, the faithful partner, who has held to me, come weal, come woe, for so many years!’

“At this moment, a neighbour came in with a long story about his wife, Jenkin, who was lying ill, and could get no sleep at night from a herd of cats who had their meetings at the back of his house. ‘Give me some poison, doctor,’ he said.

“I recollected finding among the other things a

little strychnine, which got there I don't know how. I gave him some, and went out to the door with him to talk over the state of his wife, leaving the major behind leaning his head on his hand."

Miss Manuel slowly turned her face away from the coals, and was looking eagerly at him.

"I only say this," said the old man, looking restlessly from side to side. "Two days later, the neighbour came back for more of the poison, which had done good work, and I never could find it. Even that night I missed one of the bottles, but I did not know it was *that* one. When the neighbour came again I could not find it, and something whispered me that the major had taken it. It seemed unjust—unreasonable—wicked; but the idea took possession of me."

The wind, long kept waiting, was now thundering at the old bow-window, as if it had suddenly found a shoulder, and was driving furiously with that shoulder against the door.

The old man shrunk away in terror, and stopped for a moment.

"The neighbour came pretty often—for he was anxious about his wife—to see if I had found it, and came often, too, when the major was sitting in the parlour. 'What a fuss,' he said one day, in a pet, 'about that wretched stuff. I never come in

here but you are harping on it. Give that fellow something else, and have done with him.'

" 'Well,' said I, 'major, it was very odd the way it disappeared.'

" 'Very odd?' he said, impatiently; 'in this wild nest of confusion, it is a wonder you can find anything.'

" My son had to go up to the major's wife the next night, who was very ill indeed, in something like catalepsy. 'A new shape, father,' he said to me, when he came home. 'That woman is running the round of every sickness in the Clinical Medicine. I can make nothing of her. There she is, now chattering and trembling, and her spine going like a pendulum——' "

" What idle stuff this is," said Miss Manuel, suddenly. " All foolish dreams! And this is your story? You mislay a dusty old bottle, and you talk of poisoning! A nightmare."

" Ah! I wish it were," said he, crooning the words out sorrowfully. " But my son, a week later, searching in a cupboard in her room when the major had gone down, found the very bottle (for it had a special make)—I wish *that* had been a nightmare!"

Again Miss Manuel's eyes sparkled with interest. She said, " You know something more."

" Ay," said he, " and that she herself told us.

That is her scared looks at him. Never for a single moment—and this I remarked—did he allow any one to be in the room with her without being there himself. He was on guard always. Once she half whispered to me, ‘For God’s sake send me no more’ (drugs, she meant), ‘they are killing me;’ and that moment he came with some cooling drink for her.

“‘No, no! no more,’ she said, half rising up in her bed. ‘I will have nothing else. Ask these doctors. I shall die soon; but not by——’

“‘Hush, hush!’ said the major, laying his hand on her shoulder. ‘This is for your good, dear. You *must* take the things. Look! I should ask nothing better myself.’ And he drank some of it with relish, and with his eyes fixed upon her. She hung down her head and took it silently. ‘Ah,’ he said, with a sigh, ‘some way we two have never understood each other through our lives, and never will. It is too late, I fear, now.’ I believed in the major that night.

“Two nights after, Mrs. Carter died. They came running for me (I was stronger then than I am now) about eleven o’clock, and I went up. She was shaking and chattering with her teeth clenched, and the major and his son holding her by the wrists. I never heard such shrieks and such signs of agony. Her eyes were starting out of her head. But we could do nothing.

Towards morning she got quiet, and by six, when one of those spasms was coming on again, went off with a shriek, and a sort of jump into the air.

“Two days after she was buried, the major came to me in my parlour. He was in deep grief, and wanted a certificate of her death, and the cause of her death. It was a matter of form. I was very silent, and, I suppose, suspicious. ‘Why do you want this?’ I said.

“‘As a matter of form,’ he said. ‘I must look to these things for the sake of my son. It is odious to me at this time, when I should be at the grave of my wife; but some one must look to these things. We must have this, to get some little property to which she is entitled.’

“‘How?’ I said. ‘Through a will?’

“‘O, that is no matter,’ he said, shortly. ‘All I want is the formal paper, just to satisfy those insurance people.’

“I started up. ‘O, it was an insurance, then? Ah, Major Carter!’

“He stamped his foot. ‘What do you mean?’ he said, turning on me. ‘Take care! No tricks of this sort. I warn you it will be dangerous trying them with me.’

“‘But I don’t know,’ I said (he had quite scared me), ‘what I am to sign. I know *no* cause of death. It seems all mysterious.’

“‘Then,’ said he, promptly, ‘try your “post

mortem." Look for yourselves, both of you. I give full permission. If you doubt your own skill in these matters, get some one else that *has* skill, and I will pay. What is it you are at ?'

"My son here came in, and Major Carter addressed him.

"'What is this humour your father has got into?' he said. 'I can't follow him. He is hesitating about giving the plain formal thing always given. God knows I have trouble enough without having old men's scruples to remove. See to it, Watkyn, do. I am tired and sick.'

"I am weak, I am afraid, but my son spoke with me, and reasoned with me, and showed me what he thought was the folly of these scruples. Later, too, when the major's cold eye fell upon me, it quite terrified me. That night he came back when my son had just gone out, stayed exactly a minute, but during that minute fixed that dreadful eye upon me, and said, coldly and distinctly, 'Mind what you are about, and take a friendly hint. I have crushed many as obscure, as an obscure country doctor. Take care I don't stamp you under my foot. Be wise;' and he threw the paper down on the table; 'make up your weak mind before the night is over !'

"Well, I signed that night, and—and have had a weight upon my conscience ever since. It has put ten years to my sixty years, and has made

me decrepit and miserable. These stormy nights, which come so often, make me tremble. Listen! there it goes; and I often think, if I were to be called away in one of these wild hurricanes—what——”

For more than an hour he sat and cowered under Miss Manuel's eye, sometimes shrinking away in alarm, and stopping short in what he was telling; refusing, in abject terror, to say more. Then would come a burst of the wind, and a sudden howl from the storm outside, and he would shrink and fling his head into the cushions of his chair, as if it were the earth. When he looked up again, he would see the calm face of Miss Manuel opposite to him, like a judgment. He was driven on. When all he had to tell had been wrung from him, one of the wild hurricanes came down the street, and brought with it the clatter and the roar and the metallic jingling of dislodged slates cantering down the street on their edge. With it, too, came the sound of horse's feet and of wheels, which stopped suddenly at the door. Then there were voices. The old man was on his feet in an agony of terror.

“It is a judgment on me,” he said. “He is come again, and he will tell that man, and I shall be destroyed. Go! go quick! leave me here. O, if he should find you——”

“Hush!” said Miss Manuel. “You may trust

me. No one shall know a word, nor even the whisper of a word." And she had flown to the door, and was up-stairs in her room in a second.

It was the son come home. The eminent country doctor had by some accident been beforehand with him. The pink Welshman was soured. He started when he saw his father at the door. "Not in bed!" he said, roughly. "What work is this! What have you been at? Come!"

The old man quavered out some excuse about having fallen asleep. But the son was suspicious, with the suspicion, too, of ill humour, and went away lowering at the pale and trembling father. He was yet more suspicious when Miss Manuel announced that she was going away, and took an early train to London. Most joyful was the maid in whose service she was.

Later, Mr. Speedy, and, later still, the Crown solicitors came to gather up yet further details. They groped and ferreted here and there, but they found the scent had grown cold. There were terrible gaps, and a dozen links wanting here and there, and no dexterity of the legal whitesmith could join them. Still, there was "a fair case" to go to a jury on—a case handsomely suspicious. But misfortunes came thickly. Old Doctor Jones died suddenly; and though his testimony, such as it was, was forthcoming in another shape, still it would not have such an effect "with the jury."



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An eminent Nisi Prius advocate had been secured for the prisoner, who would "knock to pieces" the "wretched case for the Crown," made up, as it was, of "old medicine bottles," and of the damaged capacities of a miserable old dotard, who "crooned" all day and night over a fire, and who, his neighbours would show, had not been in his right mind for years. Claysop, M.P., "in his place" in the House, put a question to the Home Secretary, and threatened to move for papers and correspondence, and the Home Secretary said he would communicate with the legal advisers of the Crown. In various newspapers there were articles headed "Major Carter's Case." It was taken up so warmly, and every day grew so weak, that presently all proceedings were dropped. It was spoken of by Major Carter's "friends" as "a conspiracy." But Mr. Speedy and the insurance office kept him at bay; and certainly Major Carter—never attempted to enforce his claim by process of law.

## CHAPTER THE THIRTY-FIRST.

## THE "MODERATES' CLUB."

THE town still talked for some days of this "painful" business, and a morning penny journal had a gaudy leading article, worked in all the rich colours of word painting. At the Moderates' Club, Sir Hopkins Pocock, now become faintly querulous, and with a grievance in his pocket which he took out to show every one that he met, acquired some little importance by his patent rights in previous portions of the major's history. "I knew all about him; I know all about him," he said, pushing himself into a knot of Moderators. "Bless you! there was a very curious business at Monaco, long ago. I never told of it before; but *now*——" And then Sir Hopkins began a calumnious little history about a bill, and the clergyman of the

place's son, who was only fourteen, sir, and looked twelve ("quite a child! O, it was very bad!"); by reason of which adventure the major had to hurry away precipitately from the place. Into which little tory, however, he managed to introduce so many ingenious references to his own hard condition, and to the cruel way in which his public services had been acknowledged, that the more youthful Moderators yawned in his face, and, going away, told other Moderators that "Old Pocock was at it again."

To this society belonged Romaine and Fermor, and many more of the same standing. It was a little select, more fashionable than political, and to Romaine's exertions Fermor had indeed owed his entrance. This obligation—with some more of the same social cast—he was now carrying about like a coal of fire on his head. On this night Fermor was dining by himself at a lonely table, full of bitterness. The club joint was tasteless to him; for, close by, with his back to him, was Romaine with three others dining in great spirits, and Romaine, more sarcastic, boisterous, noisy, and even insolent, than usual. Old gentlemen, busy with their newspapers, protested with fierce looks against his merriment. They were talking of the wedding.

"I knew it all along," said Romaine, in a noisy burst. "I told every man I met it would come to

a business. Ask Wallis! And yet a good fellow! I am sorry for him, I am indeed. He was always civil to me. I believe it is a conspiracy; or, if it's not, it's all one. I like him the better for it. I wish all the old wives in the world could be got rid of in the same way. I do, on my soul! But he had enemies—dozens of them. I have reason to know it.”

“Tell us about it, Romaine,” said some of the others. “Do now.”

“O, it will all come out by-and-by,” said he. “They want to turn him into a felon. I suspect a certain lady-friend of ours to be at the bottom of it; one of your fine flashing Judith-and-Holofernes pattern.”

“Bet you a sovereign I name her,” said a man opposite him. “Alfred-place! eh?”

“Keep your sovereign for your tailor, my friend,” said Romaine, contemptuously. “For a wonder, you have made a guess. You all know,” he said, dropping his voice, “that Miss Manuel! She has done the thing, I'll swear! I know her touch! It's so shabby, and so like a woman: all about a sister of hers.”

“She's a fine woman, though,” said the “man” who had offered the sovereign.

“Fine woman!” said Romaine, with disgust. “I hate to hear fellows talk in that way, as if they were speaking of joints of meat. Fine or not fine,

I dislike her. She is dangerous and spiteful. I recommend all here to keep clear of her."

Fermor listened, and heard all this with tingling cheeks. Her name to be bandied about in this low way in a public room, before waiters and "men!" Long he had been watching for an opportunity of some quarrel with Romaine; some reasonable opening, when he could "put him down." It seemed to be now hurrying on.

Romaine had turned suddenly, and had seen Fermor. "O, ho!" he said, "we must mind what we say. How de do, Fermor? He is one of her sacred band. Don't denounce us, Fermor."

There were a dozen feet between Fermor and the others. Over such a space he could not bring himself to hurl back the retort he wished; so he made no answer. The other gave a significant glance at his fellows. He was rampant with mischief and spirits. "I can't understand," he went on, "such a thing in nature as strong-brained single women who can go about like single men. I should like to have it explained to me. The idea of having a club at one's house, and taking in all the men of the town! You talk of a fine woman! now I like something petite—something pretty, and soft, and dainty," and he looked over to Fermor. The "men" laughed, and Fermor thought it was because they knew to what Romaine was alluding. He would have given the world to have grappled

with him on the spot ; but he did not know how to begin.

Presently Romaine and his men went away noisily to the smoking-room, and then to the billiard-room. Fermor got up promptly and followed them. He never took his eyes off Romaine. The other seemed to understand him perfectly, and, as he smoked and played, kept up a running fire of strokes at him all the night ; "nagging," it would be called in popular slang. Young Brett promptly dropped in and looked on.

"*That's* the style," said Romaine, pocketing a ball with extraordinary violence. "Look at that, Fermor ! *That's* the way *I* treat any man, woman, or child, that interferes with *my* play. Pocket them, eh ?"

He looked at Fermor insolently as he walked past him to make a fresh stroke.

"Let them get out of my way, I warn them. There again !" and he executed a vindictive cannon. "I say, now, Brett, we'll call the white ball Fermor. There he goes. Pocket again." And he walked round once more. "Red ball. Now, Fermor, you know who the red ball is for. There *she* goes. No ; not quite, this time !" He missed his stroke.

Fermor sat on the benches with compressed lips. He was waiting till the room cleared a little more. There were only half a dozen men there.

## CHAPTER THE THIRTY-SECOND.

## UNDER A LAMP.

“WHO is going to the fancy ball, rout, whatever it is?” asked Romaine, again stooping to play. “I am, I know. I have arranged a tableau for myself—my own actors. Ring, Brett, like a good lad, for brandies and sodas. I wish there was a company to lay on soda in the streets like a main. I’d pay what rates they asked. I hear Fermor here is going with a lantern and cloak as Guy Fawkes—ha, ha! There we go again! Nothing like it. What dress is your fine friend going in, eh, Fermor? The Queen of Sheba, eh? I should like to tell *that* lady some home truths. For the world I would not breathe her name in a mixed company, of course; but Fermor understands perfectly.”

Three of the men suddenly went out. Fermor,

boiling furiously at the recollection of past injuries, thinking, too, of the rebellion at home, thought the moment was come. He had a thought, too, of some false chivalry, as he fancied himself the champion of Miss Manuel. He jumped from his place.

“I have put up with this too long,” he said. “I won’t bear it. You have laid yourself out the whole evening to insult me. I tell you I won’t bear it.”

“Well, don’t,” said Romaine, getting his cue into position. “Just stand a little away, my friend, and continue your remarks at the other side of the table.”

“I will not listen to your slanders—on a lady, that is. It is infamous, unworthy! Before leaving this room, you must retract, sir. I tell you, you shall.”

Romaine laughed loudly and good humouredly. “We have stirred you up,” he said—“with a billiard cue. However, let us hear you out. Go on. Well?”

“I say, Fermor, Fermor,” said Young Brett, anxiously, “what are you at?”

“He *must* retract,” said Fermor, excitedly. “I’ll have none of his insolent speeches at me! I shan’t be made the butt of his smart words. You heard him. Every one here heard him. I have long been wanting the opportunity.”



“Nonsense,” said Young Brett. “Don’t you see it is all a joke?”

“Don’t interfere with me, Mr. Brett,” said Fermor, turning on him. “This man, Romaine, understands me perfectly; it is a long account. He has other things to reckon with me for. *He* knows it.”

“Well,” said Romaine, suddenly becoming grave, and resting on his billiard cue. “Well, here I am now, and here is the opportunity. Shut the door, Brett, like a good boy. Now, let us hear all about it. I am now before you, Mr. Fermor, or *Captain* Fermor. I only give you a caution in the friendliest spirit imaginable; don’t try anything of *this* sort,” he said, doubling his fingers. “I never boast; but I give you my word of honour, I broke a man’s skull in a fall, who *did* try it. I didn’t intend it. Now, what is it you want?”

Fermor glared at him. “Not boast!” he said. “I am no match for you at *that*, I know. But——”

“No, you are not,” said the other, “nor at anything else. Do you want pistols, and police on the ground, and all London laughing at us? A cheap way of getting a reputation for bravery. Are you for a theatrical duel, with the principals arrested and bound over? A public challenge in the public room of a club! Not a soul to know of it! I ad-

mire you—upon my soul I do. Now what else do you want, Mr. Fermor?"

More "men" were dropping in now, brought by that curious instinct which leads men to the scene of a commotion. There was a sort of a little audience. Romaine's eye rested on him, and Romaine's hand rested on the cue.

Fermor did not feel easy under that eye. He tried a poor abortion of a sneer. "I have no knack," he said, "at those smart words. I am not a match for you at——"

Again Romaine laughed with noisy good humour. "Indeed you are not, Fermor. Neither at billiards, nor at the gloves, nor at the tongue, nor at anything else in the world."

"I thought you never boasted!" struck in Fermor, bitterly.

"O, sometimes—a little," said the other. "We are all weak, you know. Now, my friend, while you are making up your mind as to what you are going to do, pray let me go on with my game. There! the old story. Pocket again. Ha, ha!"

Fermor almost ground his teeth with rage. But he had a curious shyness, which in presence of a crowd, palsied his wits, if not his tongue. He could have readily found such rough stock words as, "you are a ruffian, a coward," and the like. But, to do him justice, he shrank from such Billingsgate. The "men" looked on, wondering.

If faces could stab, wound, beat, scourge, then was Romaine tied to a stake, and gashed and scourged thoroughly. But, as it was, he saw that he had the victory.

“What is it all about?” said the “men.”

“We have been having an argument, Fermor and I,” he said, “and I believe I have the best of it. Another good stroke.”

At last the games ended, the night ended, the “men” dropped away. “Now to get our great-coat,” said Romaine. “I have made a very good night’s work of it, beaten everybody all round,” and he looked at Fermor. He lit a cigar at the door. Fermor followed him close.

“Well,” said an old member, “well, Fermor, you are about the most even-tempered man I ever came across. Hang me! but I would have slapped him in the face—I would.” Fermor flew out after Romaine.

“You don’t mean to tell me you are coming *my* way?” said Mr. Romaine. “Well, well.”

“You shan’t escape me now,” said Fermor, walking hurriedly beside him. “You have no audience here. Once for all, you must account to me for your behaviour. I have you now.”

“Beginning again?” said Romaine, buttoning up his coat, and puffing his cigar. “Hints, lessons, all thrown away, I see.”

“It is unbearable,” said Fermor, walking furi-

ously. "You have no spirit. Any other man would have——You are a——"

"Hush, hush, nonsense," said Romaine. "I don't think you know the full force of what you are saying. As you say, there is no audience here, and you are getting courage. My good friend, it is well you did not bring out that ugly word that was on your lips. I tell you calmly and candidly, if you had——"

"Well?" said Fermor, trying a sneer.

"Well? I should have waited until we came to this lamp-post, seized you so, and I fear—broken your spine." (In a second he had Fermor pinioned by both arms, with *his* spine to the "shoulder" of the lamp-post.) "If you doubt me, just as an experiment try and say it. Come!"

Under the lamplight came from Romaine's eyes such a sharp, wicked flash, and there was such an Indian savageness about his lips, that Fermor saw in a second that he was in earnest.

Luckless Fermor! it was the deepest humiliation. But there was a ferocity in the other's face that could not be trifled with. Already he saw his knee half bent, ready to be raised to lay upon his chest. As it was, he could hardly gasp. There might have been a temptation in the other's mind to use this tempting opportunity to rid himself of one who was in his way.

Writhing, groaning, frantic with helpless fury,

he thought he would have gone mad. He could not speak for mortification. The eyes of Romaine were a few inches from his own eyes, looking at him with malicious eagerness. The cigar of Romaine was close to his cheek. Some one passing by, stopped a moment and laughed. But some one else stopped suddenly under the lamp, started, and spoke :

“ Fermor !” he said, “ here, and in this way ! What is this about ? ”

“ Ah, Hanbury !” he said. “ I am so glad. Come and look. Look at our friend. He has been a little pettish to-night—given me all manner of trouble.”

This was, indeed, humiliation. Hanbury felt for him.

“ Come, come,” he said, “ this is the public street. It is very boyish, I must say. Come, let him go. Do, now.”

“ It is the public street, my friend,” said the other, gaily. “ That is just the reason.”

“ You must. Here, I want to speak to you, Romaine. Look—suppose some of the club men were to pass ? Nonsense. You have had enough amusement.”

He was very strong—stronger than Romaine—and gently and good humouredly drew him off.

He let Fermor go. “ It won’t do after all, Fermor ! You will have to pay a fellow, as they do

in Ireland, and get *him* to do the job. There's your hat. Don't try that again, I would advise you. It was too tempting. You have no idea what a little pressure of the knee will stave in the chest in that position. Now don't persist in seeing me home. In fact, my good Fermor, as a general rule, don't think of interfering with me."

Fermor was now free. All his fury burst out. He drew back, and was going to fly at Romaine, but the latter threw his cigar on the ground, and, raising his arm, said, in a tone there was no mistaking, "Take care, take care! Hanbury, I give you notice, I shall not put up with any tricks of this sort. Take care, now. I warn you."

Hanbury stepped between them. He *saved* Fermor. "Go home," he said, "Fermor; it is all a joke."

Romaine walked away very fast, and even singing, and left the unhappy Fermor glowering, almost moaning, with rage. But he was half tamed. "This man has a spell over me," he said, passionately. The moment Romaine was gone he felt a frantic impulse to rush after him, and again "bring him to account." He went home that night degraded to himself, and the men at the club were very jocular over the "devilish diverting way" that Romaine had handled him.

The spectacle had, however, troubled Young Brett, that excellent Samaritan, not a little. He

understood what was in Fermor's mind, and he began to pity him. He was *his* old friend, and his old friend he had admired so. "He was no match," he thought, "for that rude rough man." So this honest boy was with Miss Manuel next day, telling her the whole. "I am sorry for him, indeed I am," he said. "I wish I could help him. And indeed, Miss Manuel, you have a friend in him, for he was fighting *your* battle like a trump. Not, indeed, that any one was saying anything—that is——" And he stopped in some confusion.

Pauline smiled. "Do you think I mind? You may tell me the truth. They were abusing me, and he defended me. Well?"

"Defended you," said Young Brett, with enthusiasm, "it was regular championship. He would have fought Romaine for you. Really, he wanted to have him out at once. You ought to like him, I say, Miss Manuel."

After Young Brett was gone, Miss Manuel thought of this with softness. "It is something to have a friend," she said, "and if I had any influence with him for *her* sake, I might use it to bring him back to that child who hates me so." Later, she sat down and wrote, and directed a letter to Captain Fermor.

## CHAPTER THE THIRTY-THIRD.

## NEWS FOR LADY LAURA.

THIS was now the day of Lady Laura's great festival. Everything had been hurried on, and everything was ready—under her captaincy. She had found money, time, stage properties, people, everything; for, even in their own department, Blanche and Laura junior were to all intents and purposes utterly helpless. She would have turned out the same in any department. Had she been suddenly appointed to the commissariat in the Crimea, she would have found a sudden instinct for the duties, and have performed them quite as well as the men of the regular service. She now showed that she knew about scenes and about painting, and with good sense directed the working hands whom she was obliged—alas! at great cost—



to have in. She even trained Laura junior and Blanche, and taught them some happy and effective poses. She found time for all this, and it was not known that the charming Swiss shepherdess dress, in which Laura was to appear, had been privately put together by those old, and worn, and untiring fingers, though popularly believed to be a triumph of Madame Adelaide's skill. She had been a little disturbed at Young Spendlesham's absence from the wedding breakfast ; but she soon discovered that he had been called away suddenly to the country, but would be back that evening positively. For the moment she had been disquieted, but this news set everything straight.

On this last day she was everywhere—in working clothes, as it were. She overlooked the men putting up a canopy at the hall door, and others busy forming the balcony into a temporary chamber, which she knew would be valuable for the purposes for which she had lived. These were sad expenses ; but they were of the last necessity, and she had got them put up far cheaper than any man or woman in town could have had them put up. Nor was she without hopes of profit for her outlay ; for already she seemed to detect on the edge of the web she had spun round Laura junior (Laura junior was incapable of forming a web for herself), a figure of fair proportions looking in curiously. That night might see him floundering helplessly

in the net. Success brings success, just as eating brings on appetite.

To this day, too, many had been looking forward. But in the Fermor house it was to bring on a crisis. The unhappy man had come home—degraded it may be—but full of miserable pique and rage, that could not find the object it desired, but thirsted for a victim. He associated Mrs. Fermor with his treatment. “If I die for it,” he said, “she shall not have this opportunity!” It was remarked by the ladies and gentlemen below, that the lord and lady of the house “did not speak” now. News of the family *émeutes* had penetrated to neighbouring areas. Mrs. Fermor—to whose injuries every day’s neglect added—met his treatment with stern defiance, and was girding herself up for this last struggle.

Not, indeed, that she cared for that wretched show. She shrank from it, and from the unknown issues that rested on it. But her coral lips, a little thinner than they had been, were pressed together with the tightness of defiance. One soft word, and they had been relaxed; but she only saw corresponding defiance, and a sort of unconditional hostility.

It was a gloomy day, and seemed charged with presentiments. Later on, towards the evening, came the servant to know at what hour the carriage would be wanted. Mrs. Fermor was passing up

stairs, and she heard her lord in the hall below, saying in a loud sour voice, "It is not wanted to-night. Who said it was? What does the fellow come worrying here for? He will be sent to if required."

"He was told to call up, sir. Mrs. Fermor sent me."

"I tell you he is not wanted," said Fermor, furiously.

And the serving gentleman, at the evening tea, informed his friends below that up-stairs they would be "Hat it again afore night!"

Mrs. Fermor, on the stairs, heard this interdict of the carriage. "So he wants to drive me to extremities," she said. "Let him, then. Here, John!" she called out, "don't let the man go yet." And she stepped down excitedly—to battle.

She shut the study door. "What is this about the carriage?" she said, trying to speak calmly. "I shall want it to-night."

"Is it to go to this thing?" he answered her.

"No matter for what purpose," she replied. "I am entitled to it. I am sure you don't intend to expose our affairs to the talk of the people below."

"Not for that. I told you before I don't choose you to go to this place. I am determined, I know, and I want no argument about it."

"That remains to be seen," she said, her foot

beating the floor. "I am going. Fortunately, there are *other* carriages to be got."

"Mr. Romaine's, I suppose?" he said, with a sneer.

"Mr. Romaine is a gentleman, and a true friend to me," she answered, with trembling voice. "He would not expose me in this way."

"You had better go with him in a cab, I suppose," said he. "Don't talk to me about him. I don't want it. I have made up my mind, and I have told you so, and I give no reasons. There!"

"No wonder you don't like to talk of him," she went on, quite flaming with excitement; "you are brave to me, but I know you are in terror of him."

Fermor turned white. This allusion was but an accident, but it seemed as though she had heard about *that* night, and was taunting him. He started up, and pointed to the door. "After *this*," he said, almost choking, "leave me. *Now* we understand each other. Go away, I say. I shall end this in some way—and before long, too. It's all over now."

He did not know what he was saying or what he was doing. She was a little scared, because not understanding the real reason of his fury, and let the man go without a word about the carriage. But when she was alone, the original defiance

returned, and, according to the old formula, emphasised with a little fierce stamp, "if she was to die for it," she would not yield.

It was now past six o'clock. Fermor was still raging in his study. He heard voices in the hall, and burst out: "What is this? What is this noise?" It was another "man" with a message from Madame Gay's. The grand dress would be home at eight, punctually; it might be depended on. There were some alterations; but a dozen hands were working on it simultaneously, like slaters on a roof. Fermor retreated into his study, trembling, but with a grim idea in his head.

At Lady Laura's house the moment was drawing on. By incredible exertion everything had been got ready, and the "men" happily out of the house. The last touches had been given, and we know by whom. Indeed, the first and middle, as well as the last touches, had all come from the same hand. Tired, fagged, but dressed in her finery (the first "down," too, for Laura junior and Blanche were always late), she was in the field, walking round her rooms, now clear, clean, fresh, and lighted. Here, in the drawing-room, was that pretty stage at one end, and the flowers, and the lights; and here, below, was the supper set out, under the same superintendence, with a small corps of select and steady waiters,

who were known to be equal to more work, at the same tariff, than their fellows. The women were waiting to take the cloaks—in fact, all was ready. She went up again after this final survey, and stood at the fire alone in her room, trying to warm her weary foot upon the fender. As she looked down on that weary foot, and then looked into the coals, perhaps she saw there, in the little fiery crags and gullies, scraps of that weary panorama she called her life, the course that she had worked out with weariness and buffeting. Perhaps, too, she was longing that, just as the little fiery craters and precipices crumbled down upon one another, so her life, too, might end at last; and perhaps she was wishing for some final repose—just as her worn and aching head was then longing for some physical repose upon a pillow. It was noted how in those days the people under her found her softer and less imperious and fretful.

The clock on the chimney-piece had struck nine. Every one had been enjoined to be there early, on account of the dramatic part. The company were about due now. Hark to the rolling of the carriages. Whatever she had been thinking of, whether sad or hopeful, she now withdrew the weary foot from the fender, and “recovered” herself. Who would come first? for there was the thunder of wheels at the gate, and the

quick plunge of horses suddenly checked; and here was the smile of reception snatched hurriedly, as it were, from her pocket, and fitted on. Behind it was, perhaps, a real smile, for she was thinking of Blanche's or Laura junior's lovers.

As she took her post at the door (the arrived were undraping below, and receiving a scrap of visiting card as a token), the select waiter came up with a note on a salver. An apology, of course, which was welcome; for she always left a margin for such things, and room was sadly wanted. She thought she knew the hand. It was from Sir John Westende.

"I never asked *him*," she said, wondering. Then she read it with a strange stare, that mystified the waiter, who was standing by, salver in hand:

"DEAR LADY LAURA,—My duty to my ward, Lord Spendlesham, has compelled me to take a course I much regret. For many reasons I could not approve of the alliance he was about making, but in a conversation which I had with him yesterday, I prevailed on him to take the view which is best for his own interest. The thing, as you will admit, is wholly out of the question. He is in full possession of all the details—quite takes the view that I take, and is now down at my house in the country. But, with a generosity which does

him honour, he has proposed to let *you* take the business of breaking the affair off on yourself. And if you think fit to adopt this course, you will write to him to-night a letter to that effect. It is a very painful and unfortunate business altogether, but you will see, with your usual good sense, that it was impossible it could go on.

“I am, dear Lady Laura,

“Yours truly,

“JOHN WESTENDE.”

Did she utter a sound beyond a sigh, or did the “steady” waiter see pass across her face more than a short spasm? He was now chanting “Mr. and Mrs. Henry Wandesforde! Miss Wandesforde.” And those guests were defiling up the stairs, Mr. Wandesforde pulling hard at his gloves. Mrs. Wandesforde’s wrists chinked with the sound of rattling bracelets as she received the hostess’s warm welcome. Mr. Wandesforde’s figure, in a sort of annular eclipse, and partially in shadow from clouds of tulle in front, bowed from a distance. *He* did not suspect what ghastliness was behind the smile that greeted them. Then the stream set in, and began to ascend steadily.

Now came Laura junior rustling down (Blanche was above, in the Swiss peasant’s dress). The mother went through all the routine duties earnestly and with activity. She was in motion

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always—in the motion of speech when not in that of figure. She went through all the features of the part without omitting a single thing. She had a word for all. She carried on the thing “behind the scenes.” She flew up to her daughter—poor Blanche, in the Swiss peasant’s dress—and encouraged her kindly, and with sympathy, to do her part well. Those words fell strangely on Blanche’s ear.

“Has he come, mamma?” she asked, settling the “bands” of the peasant dress.

“By-and-by, love,” said mamma. “I am afraid he will not be here till late—he has written to say so. But that makes no matter, you know. You are looking charming, dear, in that dress.”

And Blanche, a good girl, perhaps, after seeing a patch of warm sunlight—a sunlight something like affection—on that worn, broken landscape, put up her lips and kissed her. Talk of the Greek play-writers and their terrible element of fate and necessity, here was as fine a bit of tragedy as they could have thought of.

The show began, and the show went on. She never relaxed. Mr. Romaine had come to the front, anxious to consult her about Mrs. Fermor. She had not come. “We could not begin without her, you know,” he said.

“O, we can send for her, to be sure,” said Lady Laura, with alacrity.

“And Spendlesham,” said Romaine, “what is he about? No one seems to be in time.”

“Later—all later,” said Lady Laura, with a smile. “There is no hurry, you see.”

“Well, then, we may begin,” said Mr. Romaine, “and I myself will go for—the Fermors.”

John Hanbury was there beside him, and almost heard his speech. Romaine gave him a bitter look of impatience. He was caring very little for the show of that night. He was thinking of some other place.

It began with the Parting of Hector and Andromache, the Trojan hero, in fine foil armour, depicted by young Wainwright; the tearful wife by the lovely Cecilia Towler, Lady Towler's eldest. There was appropriate music, suggestive of Troy and the hostile Greeks; and the “Parting,” lasting about a minute, the tableau was over. Lady Laura was seen applauding. They all thought how she was enjoying it. Mr. Romaine, out on the landing, and biting his nails, was restless and impatient. Finally, he “plunged” down stairs angrily and left the house. John Hanbury, who had been watching his motions quietly, very soon after glided down stairs, and also left the house.

## CHAPTER THE THIRTY-FOURTH.

## DANGER.

IN Fermor's house, with Fermor sitting in his study as in a den watching jealously for something, the same state of things continued on that dismal evening. Some one else was watching as feverishly up-stairs.

"So *he* has told her," he thought, pacing up and down, "and she *dares* to taunt me. I shall break her yet." He stopped, for he heard a sound of feet and shuffling in the hall. It was the sound he was looking for. A man had come with a great black box, a huge casket, containing the treasure.

The dozen hands simultaneously busy on the dress had it finished to the moment—some one walking up and down, and urging them on as an

overseer does the galley-slaves at the oar. It was sent home to the minute, for Madame Gay was nice about her reputation. Fermor came out of the den. This night he was sadly excited—so excited as to do what at another time he would have thought ungentlemanly.

“Bring that in here,” he said.

Mrs. Fermor’s own maid was tripping down to welcome the treasure, to take it out into her own arms. There was great curiosity in the house as to how “missus” would look in the “playacting” dress.

“Bring that in here!” repeated Fermor, “box and all. Do you hear me? Must I tell you everything in this house twice over?”

It was brought in without a word. The lady’s maid flew up-stairs to her mistress with the news.

“Now,” thought Fermor, locking the door, and getting his hat, “we shall see.” Madame Gay’s great black box lay there—imprisoned—an unaccustomed atmosphere. To the old sane Fermor of years back it would have seemed, perhaps, a pitiful, mean, little, and unworthy trick.

As he went out, a man came up the steps with a note. It was Miss Manuel’s note. He knew the handwriting at once, and hurried to the light in a flurry; he read it under a street lamp—read it in a wild tumult of agitation.

Miss Manuel had written :

“ I cannot delay thanking you for a kindness, the news of which has just reached me. I mean the way in which you took my part yesterday. Such behaviour is like heaping coals of fire on my head. I do not deserve it—indeed no—for if you knew what I dare not tell you, but which is yet a vile hypocrisy not to tell you, you would, I fear, despise me. Some of these days, perhaps, you shall know. And yet I shall venture to ask a favour when I see you again, one that concerns yourself and your interests.”

His head seemed to swim with wild triumph as he read. “ It is true, then,” he thought. “ She owns it! It is what I have long suspected. She loves me! She has been struggling with it. I am the old Fernor still.”

The quietness of home was ungrateful to him—its fierce rebellion it was misery and pain to think of. *Here* was hope, brightness, and a sort of ghost of the old pride and elation.

“ *She* loves me,” he thought, walking fast. “ *She* esteems and values me. With her I can feel hope, and joy, and love, and happiness. She cannot suppress what she feels.” Suddenly a wild impulse seized him. He had thought of answering the letter at once, in a sort of rapturous tone; but it would be better to go to her straight himself. In a moment he was in a Hansom cab, galloping to-

wards Alfred-place. The driver did not know that the wild heart of his fare was travelling faster than the good horse in the shafts.

Mrs. Fermor, told by her maid of this last blow, sat on her chair before her glass in her bedroom. "You may go down, Wallace," she said. "Or stay, bring me up my papers and pens." She was almost stupified at this last stroke of poor impotent spite, but more mortified at the whole house being made parties to the quarrel. "To disgrace me in this way!" she said, in a frantic burst of tears. "But I will baffle him yet. *Now* he shall find that I can meet him. God help me! he is driving me to this." And she wrote a hasty note to Mr. Romaine:

"Come to me quickly. I want to see you and consult you.

"M. F."

## CHAPTER THE THIRTY-FIFTH.

## MR. ROMAINÉ'S PROPOSALS.

M. F.! even in these initials there was an unlawful confidence. As she was folding the note, her "own maid" appeared at the door, and said that Mr. Romaine was below in the drawing-room. Mr. Romaine's cab was waiting at the door. He had come post from Lady Laura's.

Her hair was down on her shoulders. She hastily "turned it up" in some fashion—in any way. She looked beautiful, brilliant with the sense of suffering outrage, and suppressed grief and anger. For the moment it seemed to her—poor little soul!—that Providence had sent her this man to be her protector and friend. "Heaven has raised me up this true friend," she thought, with an odd perversion of devotion. "I shall

cling to him now." She flew down, and ran to him like a bird fluttering. He started back, she looked so bright and engaging.

"O," she said, "Mr. Romaine, I am so glad you have come to me. I was writing to you, to beg, to implore, that you would——"

"Good gracious!" he said, "what has happened? Tell me everything."

"You are my friend," she went on, hastily; "at least, I have begun to think you are; and I don't know what to do. I am miserable, wretched, unhappy. I have no one to help me, no one to care for me," and bright tears began to gather in the bright eyes.

Romaine was looking at the soft helpless creature with pure sympathy and admiration. "Do you tell me," said he, with contracting brows, "that he has been at his work again! It is insufferable. I thought I had given him a lesson last night that would have lasted him for years."

"O," said she, bursting out helplessly, "he does not know me. He treats me cruelly. He does not understand me."

"*Indeed* he does not," said Romaine, moodily; "not he. No teaching will do him good. Never, I see. What do you suppose he was doing last night? Championing Miss Manuel before a whole club; trying to quarrel with me about her. I had to give him a lesson. Dearest Mrs. Fermor, I do



feel for you. I wish to Heaven I could show you how I do feel. What is this business now? I can guess. This tyrant will not let you go. I know it! What a mean, pitiful, unworthy spite! Good Heavens! what a shame! what a sin!" he went on. "My heart bleeds for you! But what shall I do, what would you like me to do?"

"No, no," she said, hurriedly. "I suppose he does not think or know what he is doing."

"He does. He does," said Romaine, savagely. "Where is he now? Ah, I could guess. But look, dearest child, you will not submit to this. Your life will become a slavery worse than they have in Siberia. He will encroach every day more and more. If you yield to him, he will only require more. My dear, dear Mrs. Fermor, I know you, I know your heart, and all that you have suffered. I do indeed. I am a rough, rude, travelling fellow, but I feel. I shall not let this go on. I can't see a sweet, charming, lovable creature trampled into ruin. We must save you at every risk."

"Save me?" she said, wondering. "How? Do you wish me to go to this place? He has my dress locked up in his room."

"*This* place?" he said, impatiently. "I have forgotten it. I am not thinking of that. What does that concern us? I am thinking of your life and happiness. How are you to stay with this

man, who will only live to persecute and harass you? Listen to me. We are alone here. Now is the opportunity. Long, long, I have known you—esteemed, admired, loved you—yes, loved you—and never so much as to-night. My heart is bleeding for you. Come, let us leave this house—this house, this country, this mean, *miserable*, degraded man, whom I all but flogged last night.”

She started back from him with a cry—as far back as the curtains, which she caught at and clung to. “What dreadful language is this?” she said, frightened. “What do you mean?”

“I do mean it,” he said, advancing to her. “I do mean—that I have long seen and loved you—yes, *loved* you. And I tell you it is no crime, or sin, as the cold world would make it. You are not to be sacrificed to a wretch—a monster like that. Heaven has sent me to save you!”

Mrs. Fermor shrank away from him over to the wall. “O, go away,” she said, in horror. “O, God help me. I am betrayed by every one.”

“Dearest Mrs. Fermor, not by *me*,” he said, coming still nearer. “I am serious. I am in earnest. I have never cared really for any woman yet. But in you, for the first time, I have seen what I can love and adore. The sufferings you have borne——”

“Go away, *do* go away,” said Mrs. Fermor, shrinking still, and clinging to the curtains.

"I did not think you would be so cruel, or so wicked! O, this indeed opens my eyes. I am betrayed by every one. O, Heaven help me! I have brought this on myself! O! O!" And she fell upon the sofa in despair and grief.

Romaine looked at her with gleaming eyes. Miss Manuel's wish was bearing fruit. He had advanced towards her, when a heavy step was heard beside him, and a heavier grasp was laid upon his arm, and a steady, solemn voice rang in his ear,

"This is manly! Go away! Leave this house."

"*You* here!" said he, in a fury of impatience. "What cursed business makes *you* come intruding?"

"Ah! Mr. Hanbury," said she, rushing to him. "Help me! help me! All the world is turning against me."

"You may rely upon *me*, at least," said Hanbury, sadly, "for such poor help as I can give. First, do you wish this man to remain?"

"No, no, no! a thousand times no!" she said. "But I have brought it on myself. I have been foolish and wicked. I have indeed. And I don't know where to turn to——"

"No, no," said Hanbury, "you are only too confiding and unsuspecting; but there are plenty of wicked men abroad ready to take advantage of it for their own vile ends."

“How?” said Romaine, furiously, and advancing on him.

“This is a drawing-room, recollect,” said Hanbury, with contempt. “I do not leave unless Mrs. Fermor requires me. Do you?” he said, turning to her.

“No, no,” she answered him, hastily.

“Do you wish him to go?” he asked, pointing with his finger to Romaine.

“O yes,” she said, as eagerly.

“Now,” said Hanbury, “you are a gentleman, I believe, and have experience in the world, and I am sure will understand a hint. You will not intrude in a lady’s house?”

In a few moments Hanbury was alone with Mrs. Fermor. “O, I have brought this all upon myself. It is *my* own doing.”

“Where is Fermor?” said Hanbury. “Shall I bring him——”

“But will he save me, or protect me?” she said, wringing her hands; “all—all are the same.”

“You must see him,” said Hanbury, “and trust to him alone. Ah! it was a pity you cast off Miss Manuel. Hers was a true heart, that loved you, that yearned after you. But you would not trust her.”

“She!” said Mrs. Fermor, her face full of doubt. “Why, she is at the bottom of all. She has stolen my husband from me!”

Hanbury almost laughed. "Miss Manuel! How little you know her. Can you trust me? Then I solemnly declare to you some one has been leading you astray for their own views. Ah! it is a pity not to have an instinct for true friendship. Where shall I find Fermor?"

"I don't know, I don't know," she said, distractedly.

Hanbury left her. Some astounding instinct whispered to him, "Alfred-place." At the best, he thought of Miss Manuel as being the one who should come and give confidence to the poor deserted girl.

## CHAPTER THE THIRTY-SIXTH.

## NEMESIS.

FERMOR had got to Alfred-place. While there was a block of carriages and cabs at his mother's house, while the people in the street were stopping to see the shadows cast upon the canvas of the illuminated balcony, and the little procession of ladies flitting from their carriages up the steps into what seemed an open and refulgent furnace-door, he was hurriedly getting out of his "Hansom," and entering Miss Manuel's. Could she see him for a moment? he sent up word. She was above all conventionality, and saw him.

He entered in a wild tumult, his eyes flashing. There was the old trouble on her face in permanence; but on this night he thought her dazzling and splendid.

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"I have come," he said, closing the door.

"What," said she, "you not at the festival to-night?"

"I don't care for such things," he went on, "you know I don't. I got your note. *That* was festival enough for me."

"And your wife—that poor gentle thing, who somehow hates me so—she is there, I know, glittering like a star. Who can have filled her little soul with such cruel prejudices? I would give the world to be loved by her, and that she would let me love her; but she seems to fly from—to shrink from me."

At the first part of this speech Fermor's brow was contracted, but at the second some complacency came upon his face. He could give a hint of the reason of this repulsion, but he made no answer.

"It was good of you to come," she went on. "I wanted to thank you. I heard of your generous conduct. Any one else would have kept back. I did not expect it from any one, and not from you."

"What," said he, "do you not know me yet?"

"I begin to do so," she said, "but, alas! you have not begun to know *me*. It is late for one's eyes to be opening, yet not too late, I hope. O, I could tell you such a sad history of humiliation, which you have a right to know. But you will be

generous, and spare me. I thought I was doing a holy thing—carrying out what would have been the dear wish of another; but now, not too late, I have discovered that I was in a false, wicked track. O, I have suffered,” continued Miss Manuel, “and paid a heavy penalty for my folly—a heavy, heavy penalty indeed.”

Fermor, who followed but indistinctly, for he was only thinking of the general purport of this confession, said, eagerly, “Ah, it is easy for me to forgive. So you ask me?”

“Yes,” she said, “I do. And I have something else to ask, which you will not refuse. I am glad you have come to me to-night. You would save me, I know, dreary hours of remorse—what would be a life of miserable regret. You do not know what I have suffered during these few days. I have seen misery, wickedness, guilt, ruin, all coming on fast, and which I know has been my own doing, but which I have not power to stop. O, Fermor, think what it must be for me to look on while the innocent are hurrying to destruction—to think that this is my own doing. I have not slept; I have not lived. I have spent these days rushing through this great city, crying for help to this person and that, and now find that you are my last chance.”

“What can I do?” said Fermor, hurriedly; “say it. Can I refuse anything that you ask?”



“Then, save *her*. That soft, lovable, tender thing, that I——O, I can't *think* of it. I cannot speak to *her*. Every step I take towards *her* only fills *her* with suspicion. It is *you* who must act. Take *her* away! Fly this miserable place! Be-gone yourself! You don't know the dangers. Why, even at *this* moment while we talk——”

A light came into Fermor's eyes. “Ah, you don't know the whole of *that* story,” he said. “Gentle and tender! Why, I have left a hell behind me at home. I have made the great mistake that so many make, and have found it out too late. Fly with *her*? Never! *You* talk of suffering; you don't know what *I* have suffered. I have been vilely deceived—deceived in every way. On their heads be the consequence of their own imposture! But I hope to have done with them from this night.”

“How?” said Miss Manuel, with wondering eyes.

He went on, with a voice almost breathless from agitation: “Don't think that I have not been able to translate your words, and your letter; that I have not seen enough of men and women, and the world, not to know what is behind, and what is unknown even to yourself. I know what is struggling in your mind, what is the meaning of those griefs and this remorse, as you think it. I shall not go back to that Inferno! Never!”

“What?” said Miss Manuel, starting up.

“Ah! you begin to understand now,” said he, still more agitated, “I think we both begin to see the light at last. Brighter days shall come for both of us. You talk of flying. Yes, let us fly; let us leave this vile place, this vile country. I have seen your struggles, your noble struggles, and shall help you by this confession. Come; what do you say?”

He waited, almost panting, for an answer. Miss Manuel had listened, with a strange wonder at first, with eyes distending gradually, and then herself rising slowly from the chair, until she was standing her full height, looking down on him. Not long had he to wait for an answer. It was already written on her curling lips. He had almost a presentiment of its tone.

“You say this to *me!*” she said at last, with a scorn that seemed to blight and blast him. “And *this* is your confession?”

He passed his hand over his eyes, a little staggered, and drew back. “You understand me,” he faltered. “We understand each other.”

“*I* understand you,” she said. “*Now* I do. God forgive my blindness for not understanding you before! God forgive my weakness and foolish repentance! God forgive me for taking you to be a weak, foolish, empty coxcomb, and not the

mean — cold-souled — heartless — black-hearted—villain that I now find you !”

The words were like a shower of blows, and he seemed to totter back under them, and with his hand vainly tried to clear his eyes. The utter surprise had almost taken away his wits.

“Unworthy of pity !” she went on ; “unworthy of all grace ! Now, indeed, the light has come ! Now I see with what cold calculation you took away the life of the darling we lived for ! And yet *she* prayed for you—thought of you in her last breath. *Now* you are destroying *another* poor child, whose only sin has been trusting too fondly to you. And you dare,” she went on, with something like fury, “to come to *me* with your vile raptures, and your odious devotion. *We* understand each other ! I want no such communion, indeed. Go away ! Go out into the street—anywhere ! Go back to your hell, as you call it ! Leave me quickly ! I can’t breathe while you are here. Go !”

She kept her arm steadily pointed to the door. To the wretched Fermor, beaten, humiliated, grovelling, she seemed to be standing over the couch of the lost Violet, like an Avenger. With his hand still before his eyes he shrank to the door. And as he crept away out to the street, so degraded that he loathed his own personal con-

sciousness, curiously the idea that was haunting him, and the gnawing reproach that rung in his ears like a knell, was that that foolish, blundering, awkward Hanbury, superior in this, had given him warning. This was, indeed, the last stroke of his humiliation.

He did not know at the moment, as he stood on the steps, looking up and down to both ends of the street, how near that unselfish Hanbury was to him. Hanbury had hurried from Mrs. Fermor eagerly, and now at the upper end of that quiet thoroughfare, saw some one come out of Miss Manuel's house. There was a lamp at the door, and under this lamp he saw Fermor's white face and yellow moustache, as it looked wildly up and down. He did not care to meet him then, and he revolted at the infatuation which took him there; so he stopped, and then he saw Fermor turn vacantly, and take the direction up the end which led away from Town. He noted his uncertain, tottering walk, and his figure get gradually lost in the darkness. Hanbury was about crossing the street, when he saw Miss Manuel's door open suddenly, and another figure burst out, and hurry up the street in the direction Fermor had taken. He knew the coal-black eyes and the dark beard of Miss Manuel's brother, and the same lamp which had shown him Fermor's blank pale face and

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yellow moustache, showed him the wild, excited features and fierce eyes of Louis Manuel.

John Hanbury was slow of thought; conclusions did not ordinarily flash upon him as they did upon other men. Manuel's figure had passed into the distant darkness, and Hanbury had his hand upon the door-bell before the idea had occurred to him to question why Louis Manuel should rush out so excitedly after Fermor. Then something like an instinct of the scene above described, as it had really occurred, came upon him, and with something like terror he went down the steps again, and followed hastily.

The miserable Fermor, shrinking from himself as if he were spotted over with some disease, kept wandering on through that dark night. He scarcely knew where he was going. He shrank from taking a direction which could lead in any way towards his home. From Alfred-place was not far to that broad district where were the spreading clayey fields, not yet built upon, where in a year or so the monster building for the Exhibition was to rise, and a new town of plaster mansions. Fashion, on this night, had not quite made up her mind, nor gathered up her skirts, for a race in this direction. The clayey fields were only cut up here and there by a stray row of houses, and lit by a stray lamp; and into this lonely district

Fermor found himself suddenly plunged. The openness and loneliness gave him relief. He was recovering a little from the awful blow—the blow to his pride. To what had been the purpose of his later life? A stroke to his overpowering vanity, and to that vanity which was so mixed with selfishness as to be more selfishness than vanity, was to him like a physical stroke or dislocation. A sense of dull pain was in his head, and the cool of the fields seemed to relieve his moral sufferings. Luckless, miserable, degraded Fermor almost deserved pity.

In a dull sort of fashion, he began to “see it all,” as it is called: the whole course of later events, with the secret of Miss Manuel’s calculating plans, which his own blind infatuation had prevented him from comprehending. Beyond that, too, his mind travelled back, and that strange expression of hers, “taken away the life of Violet,” brought up the old Eastport times again. The soft gentleness, the quiet suffering, the grateful tender worship—these were things that some one seemed to whisper to him for the first time. Rough hands were levelling the rude stone wall of stolid vanity—as iron as that stone wall against which he had dashed on the Eastport race-day, now so long ago—and he was seeing things with wonder he had never seen before.

A dull crash about his head—physical—and

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really like that crash at the Eastport wall—a flash of stars—a dull thunder in the ears—a fierce cry like a threat, mixed up with a sound like “this from Violet!”—and Fermor’s humiliation and degradation, his dreams of Eastport and of the past, were battered into insensibility. He was on the ground, with his back on the clayey soil, the white face turned to the sky, and a figure over him, fiercely beating and mashing; pounding that white face with something held in its hands. Some half-dozen terrible strokes in all. And there would have been but one more to finish the work, but for a strong man who came rushing and shouting across the field, and who caught the wild, frantic figure by the throat, and, after a struggle, flung him to a distance.

Miserable Fermor was breathing still.

## CHAPTER THE THIRTY-SEVENTH.

## AN OLD SOLDIER'S END:

AT Lady Laura Fermor's the entertainment went forward. The carriages came and went. From the street, the shadows of Captain Vansittart and Miss Egerton of Rushley were seen outlined on the illuminated balcony, as if "projected" from a magic lantern. Sounds of muffled music came from within; of the stirring horn and tinkling harp. For the tableaux were over now, and the dancing had set in.

There had been unavoidable omissions in the little show. Mr. Romaine had been seen to go, but had never returned. His dress, a rich one, was lying there. Mrs. Fermor had not come at all. Here was the most effective scene spoiled. The rest were, in truth, a little halting. In



short, it came upon the actors and audience with a surprise that there should have been so small a result, after all the extraordinary cost, and trouble, and expense. It was a relief when "the decks were cleared," and Revel's band began to wind out music, and the company to float on the soft billows of a divine Strauss valse.

Lady Laura, at the door, working the fan in her pale fingers, still kept to her duty. At times, during the night, Blanche had come to her privately, in some little trouble about the absent Spendlesham. The mother reassured her. "He has missed a train. He has sent. He will be here in the morning to apologise. Go and dance now, dear, and enjoy yourself." The well-trained Blanche always reflected her mother's tone of mind, and saw that there was not a cloud of doubt in the air. With a smile she tripped away, and was presently flying round, supported by Captain Singleman's strong arm, to the celestial air of the "Wien mein sinn" valse. The same strain had drawn many more from their seats, and absorbed them into the *mêlée*.

Lady Laura looked rather tired. She gave herself no rest. She found partners for the destitute. This night she did not care to receive any scandalous stories from some of her favourite worldly old men. It was a long and weary night. A young destitute girl, sadly unprepossessing—for whom

she had provided—said to her gratefully, “Dear Lady Laura, you should sit down. You are tiring yourself.” But she did not sit down. She worked on, and looked for plenty of physical action. How many spectres had she dancing before her eyes that night, besides her company? Almost everything there furnished her one: Blanche’s silken slip, the temporary stage, and Revel’s fine Strauss music. There was besides, up-stairs, and outside, Blanche’s trousseau, newly come home from that terrible Madame Adelaide; and above all, indistinct, and in the distance, but not less terrible, the rude and furious job-master. No wonder that old heart was chilled—chilled even to death.

By half-past two they were going. There was the departing chorus of the “delightful evening,” and the “*so* pleasant.” The ghosts of the Strauss melodies still floated in the air. The rooms were cleared with a rush, as it were, just as they had filled with a rush. The waxed floor shone and glittered under the lights—here and there was a flower, a bit of swansdown, a bit of lace—waifs or strays of the wreck. Below, they were long getting on their wraps. And Lady Laura, leaning on the chimney-piece, heard the hoarse cries in the street, and the hum of voices in the hall, and the happy salutations of lingering men.

“It was a delightful party,” said Laura junior, in great spirits. “They were all pleased.”

“Yes, dear,” said Lady Laura, in the new soft tone which mystified her daughters. “I am so glad you enjoyed yourself. Go up and go to bed as quickly as you can. You look tired, and we have to be out again to-morrow night.” Poor working soul, she could not forget duty!

The two girls went together, meaning to have a short comparing of notes on the triumphs and joys of the night. Lady Laura stayed behind, her foot on the fender, with the job-master and Madame Adelaide and the other spectres for company.

Presently she went up to her room. During that latter part of the night, staying so much at the doors, she had put on an old scarlet opera-cloak, and wrapped it about her neck. Not that she cared, or found much comfort in it, but she did not forget that there was to be duty on the next night.

The girls, rapturously photographing the joys of the night, heard Lady Laura call softly to Blanche, who came in. Lady Laura, still in the opera cloak, shut the door, and then said, “Blanche, I want to tell you something—can you bear a little disappointment?” And then, making as light of it as she could, told all about Lord Spendlesham. Blanche burst into passionate tears. Her mother consoled her, and even with effect.

“I am not sorry,” she said. “He was a foolish creature, and you would have had great trouble

with him. He was a mere boy. There were great obstacles from the beginning, in fact. I never reckoned on it regularly. Now go to bed, dear, and put it out of your head. I shall put it all out of *my* head. To-morrow I shall see him and manage him, dear. Some wicked people have got round him; or, if the worst comes to the worst, we shall think of something else, and, I suppose," she added, with an odd smile, "shall begin it all again in the morning!"

The brilliancy of the night was already before Blanche's eyes, and made her receive the artificial encouragement. She had never fancied young Spendlesham, and there had been a handsome baronet that night, single, and with the other virtues. She had more faith in that dismal anthem of her mother's, "Begin it all again in the morning!" She was struck, too, by the unwonted softness of that consolation, and coming back, when half way from the door, kissed her mother—an unfrequent ceremony, for which there was rarely time. When she was gone out, her mother dropped wearily into a chair before her dressing-glass, and then the old favourite spectres—headed by furious Madame Adelaide—all poured in afresh.

Blanche went in to her sister to find sisterly sympathy. She told her all her mortifications and sorrows, and found some comfort. The single and handsome baronet hovered in the distance, as

a sort of transparency. For more than an hour they talked of it, and of a hundred other things, taking off their finery as they went along. Laura junior, full of *her* hopes and prospects, told her story. At last they heard four strike, and with a start they thought of Duty for the next night, and Laura junior laid her head upon the pillow.

"Mamma has some plan, I know," said Blanche, "for she said she would begin it all again to-morrow. She will manage Spendlesham, I dare say. I am sure she has some clever thing in her head. I shall just run in and see. Is she in bed?"

She went in softly. "Why, mamma——" she said, for Lady Laura was still sitting before the glass, with the flowers on her head, and the red opera-cloak still about her. She was sitting, as she had sat many times before, waiting for her maid to come and begin to do her hair, when going out to the old call of Duty. "Why, mamma," said Blanche—and, running up, gave a cry—rather a shriek.

At least she was at her post, and in her old uniform. After all, it is at his post, and in the field, that the veteran should most of all choose to meet his death. That notion of "beginning it all again to-morrow," had sent a chill to the nerves and muscles of the heart. The old spirit was there, and she would have been at the front again on

the morrow, "beginning all" once more ; but the old strength had at last given way. She was not built of iron. "Begin again to-morrow!" She had often done *that*, under circumstances as hopeless ; but now it seemed to be shouted at her by the hoarse voices of the spectres. And so the heart of the poor struggling gallant soldier cracked, and in her flowers, and in her cloak, and before her dressing-glass, she slept off into quite another and more awful world, where she was "to begin again in the morning," and where there were happily no balls nor dresses, no struggle, no flowers, no fans ; no battling with bills, nor with infuriated milliners, nor job-masters ; but where it is to be hoped she found at least rest.

## L'ENVOI.

WE draw on to the end. Now that some years are between that night and this time, we see some of the figures in this story in conditions such as the intelligent reader of stories can almost fancy for himself. About the next day or so after that unhappy party of Lady Laura's, we can see the worn and spent old diplomatist, Sir Hopkins, who for weeks was flitting and fluttering about offices and ante-rooms, totter down eagerly to a cab. "Foreign Office," he calls out, "and as quick as you can." That morning he has heard of the death of the governor of the Lee Boo Island. "It is very hard," he thinks to himself. "They treat me any way! They forget my old services. It is shameful! And now to put me off with that wretched place! I suppose I must take it." And,

grumbling and indignant, he sent in his card to Harding Hanaper. "I shall try for something else," said Sir Hopkins, "before I consent to *that*." Poor soul! his heart was in office—office of some shape, and sort—Foreign Office "candle snuffing, even," if there was such employment.

Harding Hanaper was very busy. A mail was going out that night. "Good God, how that man plagues us." (Yet it was more than a month since Sir Hopkins had seen him.) "I can't see him! I won't see him! What does he want? Tell him to put it in writing." But Sir Hopkins was not to be put off like the common petitioners. His worn face found its way in. "The Lee Boo Island," he said, panting aloud, "is vacant. They have kept me so long, and altogether treated me so badly, so I suppose, Hanaper, I must be content with that—*faute de mieux*, as old Pichegru used to say."

"Where's Ridley's last paper?" said Harding Hanaper, with his face bent over documents, as if he was going to cool it in copious cold water. "Send down for it. Have a copy made of this—quick. O! well, what is it now, Pocock?"

"You know, of course you do, the Lee Boo Island is vacant. Baines died there last April."

"Ah, yes, to be sure. You were asking for it—I remember—I dare say. But you should think



about it—a man of your time of life, you know—climate, and all that——”

“O, I have considered that,” said Sir Hopkins. “So, if there is nothing else going, I am sure, after all my long services, and really after having arranged those Waipiti troubles——”

“Ah, exactly,” said Mr. Hanaper, wearily; “that’s a long time ago. Besides, they broke out again the other day, you know. By the way, about the Lee Boo Island. The chief was down himself here last night, asking about it. What was that, Manning? Now, Sir Hopkins, I am up to my eyes—mail going out, you know—Manning will tell you everything.”

Manning said to Sir Hopkins, “Sorry, sir, about the Lee Boo, but the chief said he was keeping it for Mr. Trail. In fact, he has given it to him.”

“Given it to him!” shrieked Sir Hopkins. “What is the meaning of this? It is shameful, disgraceful! I’ll expose the whole system. I’ll bring it before Parliament! What do they mean? What do *you* mean?”

And with his face contorted and crumpled into lines of piteous agony, he looked from one to the other.

“Hush, hush!” said Mr. Hanaper; “recollect the office, Sir Hopkins.”

“I’ll bring it before Parliament,” said the un-

happy diplomatist. "I'll appeal to the country. This is the way old and faithful servants are treated. It shall be taken up, I can tell you. I'll——"

"Now, Sir Hopkins, we are busy, as you see. We can't have this sort of thing. Please let us go to business."

"And Miss Manuel telling me. She promised—you know she did."

Hanaper smiled.

"If that was your prop, Sir Hopkins, it was a reed, and a broken one. I don't think you are number one *there*. Better to tell you, for the next time."

Wretched Sir Hopkins went his way almost staggering—all crow's feet, as it were. From that little churchyard at Eastport a skeleton hand seemed to reach him.

We can see Major Carter, older and more worn and not so crisp—with a Mrs. Carter—flitting round the watering-places he loved, making acquaintances. Some powerful friends had come forward on that exposé, and the words, "Shameful conspiracy," were used pretty frequently. It was found by the Crown officials that the capital case was very weak indeed—so weak, that it was not advisable to think of a trial. It must be said, too, that the shareholders in the Irrefragable were dissatisfied with the exposé. Yet Major Carter, hand-

somely cleared, and gone abroad, wisely forbore to press his claim on the company; and, by a sort of mutual compromise, the dead past was allowed to bury its own dead. Faithful, trusting Mrs. Wrigley believed in him all the time, and went abroad with him. And, it must be said, that Major Carter could always appeal to his treatment of the second Mrs. Carter as a sufficient refutation of the "foul slanders" that had been heaped upon him in reference to the first.

Now, too, is Pauline Manuel at rare intervals on English ground: when she comes to see a brother, who is placed in a quiet asylum, where his wildness is soothed and tempered on the gentlest principles. At other seasons, she too hovers about the foreign world, and, wherever she goes, people wonder at her sad handsome face, and think there must be some story connected with her.

Now, too, at a quiet cathedral town, on the grass and walks of the close, under the friendly skirt of the cathedral itself, live three persons together. The cathedral is not rich, nor has it a numerous ecclesiastical chapter. A railway has not touched it yet: so very few remark the grim old man and his daughter, and the feeble husband, whom they both support. The feeble husband walks as though a false step would shatter his frame like glass or china. The feeble husband's eyes are dim, and grow dimmer each day, and round and

about the eyes his face has been crushed and bruised out of shape through an old and terrible accident. A skilful doctor did wonders with that face, raising it, and piecing it, and restoring it (he wrote "a case" on it for some Medical Transactions); but he could not "raise" or restore the quick intuition and ready appreciation, and so every one in the cathedral town knows that the feeble husband's words come from him more slowly than he walks (as though *they* run risk, too, of being shattered), and that it takes a long time to follow a question or a remark.

Of this old and dreadful accident he ought to have died properly, but the skilful doctor saved him. As his eyes grow more dim, so does his intelligence; keeping pace with the failing of the eyes. It seems long, long ago. Sometimes, no doubt, the dull thickness clears away—the murky vapours in his brain clear away; and perhaps he then, for a moment, sees the old soft days down at the watering-place, when he seemed to be young, and airy, and elegant, and happy; and these bright figures moved to and fro before him. It was another Fermor then, different from the Fermor who came later, and who, in its turn, was different from the old young man, and the bruised, beaten Fermor, whose dim eye was, as it were, at the glass of a stereoscope. These were but sudden glimpses—but short glimpses too. Then the clouds would

come rolling in from side to side. Local doctors give him but a few years. Then there will be a choral service in the cathedral, with minor canons chanting seraphically, and a tablet on the aisle-walls with the inscription "Charles Fermor," with birth, death, and all the rest. But not a word, of course, of the old vanities, and selfishness, and weakness, and the poor old mauled *το εγώ*, or "le moi." On those Kensington fields it was battered out of all shape. When the men of his regiment come to hear of that demise, some of them will say, "Poor Fermor." They will balance his character, and some good will be discovered. It will be universally agreed "it was all that infernal conceit of his." The military verdict would be about right. That ludicrous vanity was at the bottom of all. It might have been "drawn" when he was a boy, just as his double teeth might have been drawn. But there was no one to think of taking him to the moral dentist's.

Young Brett, faithful to him to the end, often made trips down to the cathedral town, and walked by Fermor's side round the close, and spoke to him with an assumed gaiety and cheerfulness as "old fellow." And the dim dull eyes from which the colour of conceit had been long washed out, rested on the honest boy with a greater intelligence, and much comfort. Perhaps it was at such moments that the clouds

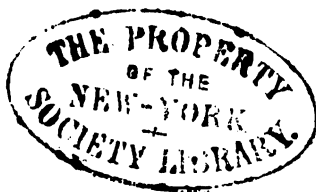
broke, and the old Eastport sun came out for a few seconds. The young wife found inexpressible comfort when she saw Brett's brave face near them. He knew the art of manly comfort, and could impart it. He always went away himself in deep distress, but left a little cheerfulness behind.

He could take a kind and gentle view of Fermor's course—at least a pitying one—as, indeed, perhaps the kind reader, who has listened to this story so far, may perhaps be inclined to do. Poor miserable foolish Fermor! Even here, looking back on this story, we may think of him gently, with some allowance, and at least draw a moral from his course.

Sometimes his faithful wife hears him articulate with difficulty the name of Violet. Far away on the coast of Eastport, which is thriving, and gorgeous with plaster palaces and assembly-rooms, and has its bathing machines, and pony carriages, with infant postilions, in whose social warp and woof gold pieces seemed to be woven in—which has its two seasons, its express trains from Town for business men—to which doctors order patients—at Eastport, so flourishing, so magnificent and pampered, strange to say, this little romance has been kept alive. It has not been choked out by the briars. The story is as well known as that of Tolla at Rome. The tradition is loved, and fami-

liar to the bathing-women on the beach. And most young girls, having heard the outline from the maid in the lodgings, or from the women on the beach, find their way to a sheltered corner of the now crowded graveyard, where charming flowers come up thickly, watched periodically by a plain good honest country gentleman, and tended carefully by a professional gardener of reputation, in the pay of a lady abroad—where there are rings and bands of choicest colours, and where, on a simple granite headstone, is carved the pretty name of

“VIOLET.”



THE END.

LONDON:  
PRINTED BY C. WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.









