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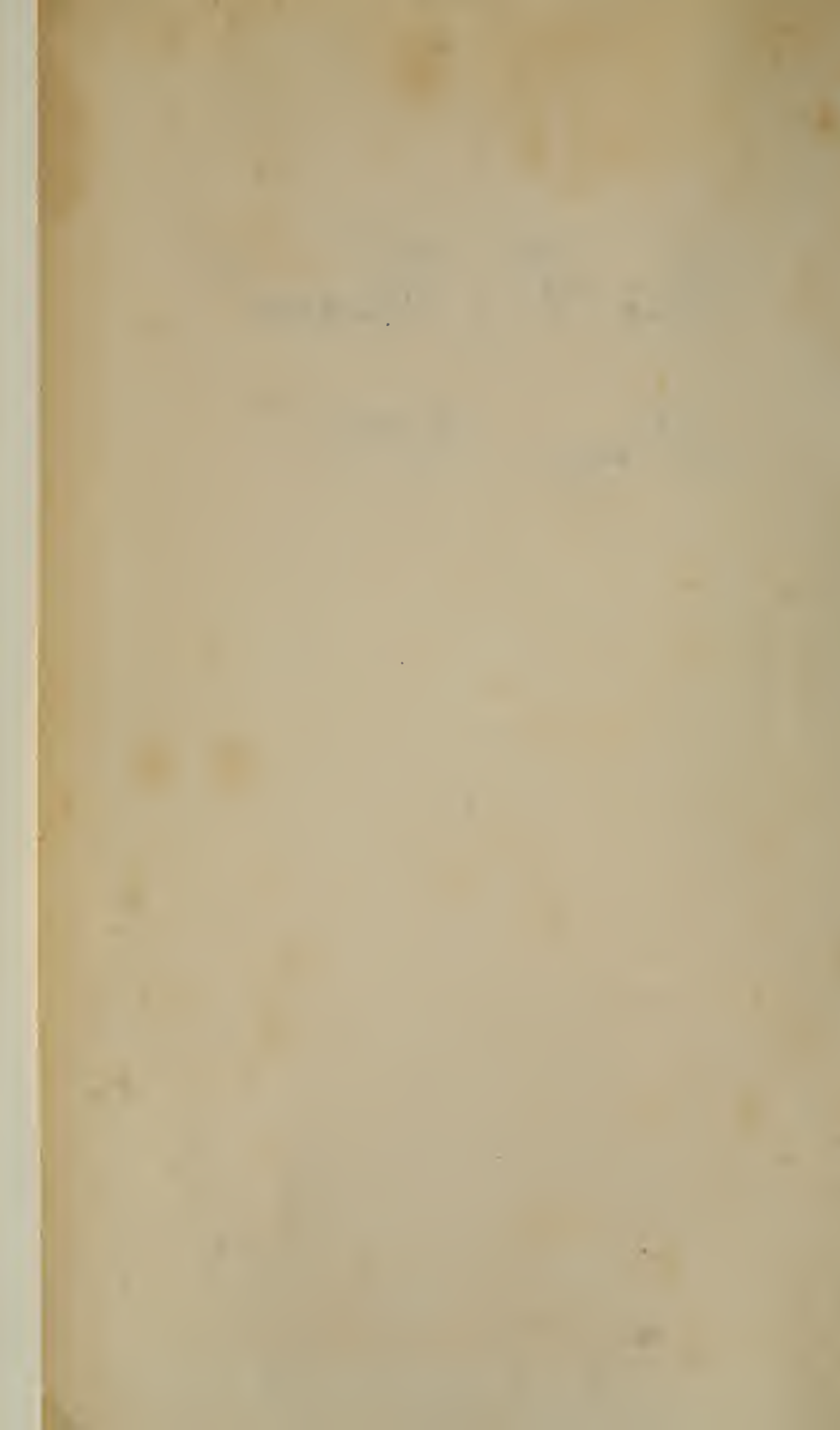






Edw F. Church.

May. 1870.



# VÉRONIQUE.

A Romance.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

(MRS. ROSS CHURCH,)

AUTHOR OF "LOVE'S CONFLICT," "NELLY BROOKE," ETC.

"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,  
'Tis woman's whole existence."

BYRON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON:  
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# VÉRONIQUE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### WATER TO A THIRSTY SOUL.

AS soon as she found that Mrs. Dowdson intended to abide by the unpalatable advice of her friend, and remain in the apartments which had been procured for her, Véronique wrote word of her whereabouts to her adopted brother, and on the fourth day of her sojourn in London, David presented himself at No. 10, Little Fitz-Cavendish Street, at a time, luckily for him, when Colonel and Mrs. Dowdson had both gone out, and he could hold a long and uninterrupted conversation with Véronique.

He had just been paid off from the "Earl of Hardbake," and looked very different from what he had done when on the

Neilgherry Hills, or even on board ship ; the picturesque, half Eastern, half European attire, which he had there affected, and had suited so well with the wild character of his native beauty, having been exchanged for an English suit of cloth, in which, although less handsome, he appeared perhaps more fit to claim acquaintanceship with a girl like Véronique, whose looks had gained instead of losing by a closer attention to the modern style of dress. To her it made small difference how David was attired, so long as he was well and glad to see her.

As yet, he was the only friend in that strange country to whom she clung ; and though she had begun feverishly to anticipate hearing news of her absent husband, it was but an evanescent hope, born one moment to die the next, ever rising, ever falling, and keeping the poor child meanwhile in a continual state of anxiety and expectation, through which however, her enduring faith still burned brightly.

David was eager to learn what she had

settled for the future, and quite disappointed when he heard that as yet she had decided upon nothing; for how could she decide until she saw her way a little clearer? Every day she waited in breathless expectation to hear the subject which was one of vital interest to her, mooted between Mrs. Dowdson and Miss Diver, but although they had held several conferences on the sayings and doings of mutual friends, the magic name of Gordon Romilly had never passed their lips, and Véronique in her simplicity, wondered how they could regard with such indifference a creature who was all the world to her.

David was anxious that she should give immediate warning to her mistress, and cross to Belgium with himself. Her service was completed—so he argued—the agreement into which she had entered was fulfilled, and there was nothing to hinder her asking Mrs. Dowdson to find herself another lady's maid, and going to Rêve under his protection. He had money more than sufficient to take them both there, and she



had the hundred pounds left her by Père Joseph, beside the proceeds of the sale of her own small possessions, to live on, until she should find means to support herself: what reason could there possibly be for further delay?

But Véronique knew the reason well, although she dared not breathe a hint of it to David; she knew that if she left London at that moment when, as Miss Diver expressed it, "all the swells were coming to town," and buried herself in Rêve, she would lose all chance of hearing news of Gordon Romilly, and might as well have never undertaken the journey home in search of him.

She knew that her best hope lay in remaining where he was likely to come, and where, if she did not meet him in the house or the street, she might at least see or hear of those who could tell her if he were dead or alive. She knew all this as well as though it had been written down in black and white before her, for it was engraven on her heart.

To find her husband, whom she believed to be hers only, and faithful to his vows, was the first and last wish and hope of Véronique, yet, forced to conceal the truth, and substitute a fable of her own invention, she made so lame a matter of deception, that David mistook her blushes and confusion, and her hesitatingly-expressed wish to remain with her mistress until she was a little more settled, to reluctance to place herself beneath his escort, and ceased to urge compliance with his wish. Yet he begged her not to remain in London longer than was absolutely necessary, nor to travel to Belgium without due protection, and he gave her the address of a "Domestic Bazaar," not far from where she lived, at which she was to apply when she wished to change services, and where he had ascertained she was certain to procure a situation.

As to his own intentions, David said little ; he appeared to have some indefinite notions of a future floating through his brain, but he would not reveal them prema-

turely. All he disclosed was, that he meant to go straight to Rêve, and from Rêve he would write to her, and communicate his plans.

Had Véronique desired it, he would have offered to remain in London until she was ready to cross with him, but Véronique did not desire it ; on the contrary, much as she was attached to the man she called her brother, she seemed relieved to hear that he had made up his mind to go to Belgium, and he perceived the feeling, and misinterpreted it.

The extreme sensitiveness which he had always entertained with respect to his colour, and which had increased tenfold since he found himself entirely amongst white people, made him misjudge her sufficiently to fancy she would rather not be seen talking or walking with him in a country where the nature of the connection between them might be mistaken, and wounded to the quick as he was by so foul a suspicion he had yet too much pride to ask her if it were not the case.



So they parted rather sorrowfully, for Véronique saw the shade which had come over David during the latter part of their interview, and grieved it was not in her power to disperse it; and they each felt (as they had so often felt of late before) that though they loved each other as much as they had ever done, something had arisen to divide them—something intangible as morning mist, yet impassable as adamant, which would never again be broken down, let their mutual confidence be as open and unclouded as it might.

But when days had passed since David's departure without her having made any progress in the search upon which she was engaged, and the days stretched themselves into weeks, Véronique began to ask herself whether she were likely to hear more of Gordon Romilly whilst in the service of Mrs. Dowdson, than if she had been buried at Rêve. The numerous visitors which that lady had confidently reckoned upon receiving as soon as her imperial presence in London was made known, had resolved

themselves into Captain and Miss Diver, who paid her an occasional call at intervals of three and four days' distance, and the Colonel's brother, a dry-headed, hard-working lawyer, who sometimes looked in at 10, Little Fitz-Cavendish Street on a Sunday evening, when he sat and discoursed in monosyllables.

Miss Diver's flying visits were evidently paid at the call of duty, for she was always in a tremendous hurry, and was never able to stay above twenty minutes, or had time to talk over old days and old acquaintances.

Indeed, she generally shirked all such subjects, with the irreverent remark that she was sick of the very name of India and everything connected with it ; and was used to receive the account of Mrs. Dowdson's present grievances with some such words as—

“ Ah ! well ! my dear, I see this kind of life doesn't suit you, so the sooner you get out of town the better. You'd feel much more like yourself down in the country ; a

lengthened residence in India spoils one for enjoying anything which is at all 'up to the mark' at home," which decision was not calculated to increase the serenity of her friend's disposition. And at this time, indeed, Colonel and Mrs. Dowdson must have found their sojourn in London extremely dull. They had arrived at home in February, and that year Easter fell late, so that the town was almost empty, and the weather was cold and ungenial.

Mrs. Dowdson, sitting alone day after day in her little dark dining-room, without a soul except Véronique and the Colonel with whom to speak, felt as though she had been transplanted to the city of the dead ; but every proposition for change on her part was met by her husband's objection of, where should they go to ? They had scarcely any friends but those they had left behind them in Madras ; they had remained so long abroad that they had out-lived nearly all their own relations in England, and such as survived were alienated from them or settled far away ; in fact, having given up



the country for which God had intended them, and adopted one in which they were not fitted to live always, they found themselves in middle-age, childless, lonely, and strangers in the land which was by inheritance their own. And this is the curse which a life in India usually entails : it is separation between children and parents, wives and husbands, friends and friends ; it is estrangement, unseen perhaps, but not unfelt, (for let poets sing what they will, love rusts from disuse) from the hearts which we should have every right to call our own ; it is the resignation of bodily strength and mental energy, the warping of our best ideas, and the narrowing of our widest feelings.

India is the nursery of bigotry, prejudice, and small-mindedness ; its enforced existence of enervating and soul-debasing indolence often kills all that promised to be noblest and best in a man's character, whilst it seldom has the power to draw out his finer qualities, and make them sterling. She is truly the Juggernaut of English

domestic life — year after year we lay beneath her wheels the flower of our British manhood, who, if they survive the process, deliver up in their turn, sweet home affections, the prattling of their children, often the best part of their wives, (for what true mother smiles as she could smile when leagues of ocean roll between her and her little ones?) generally, the best part of themselves. And then, when they have had youth, and all that makes youth beautiful—that can make old age serene—crushed out of them; when they have learned to look at life only through Indian spectacles, and to cavil at everything that is not done exactly after the same pattern as they do it in the East, they return to their native shores; to meet their children as grown up men and women, and to wander about in a listless manner like fish out of water, for the rest of their days, grumbling at what they cannot alter, and regretting what they cannot regain.

Were there no other reason to render life in India an evil, the separation from

one's children would cause it to be so. It was not for nought that the Almighty made the care of little children troublesome, and parents patient under it ; and though men and women who know nothing of such small trials, profess to laugh at those who do, their laughter comes from ignorance of the blessings hid beneath such care. The trouble and the patience re-act upon each other, and it is of their co-operation that is born that marvellous and unalienable love existing between parents and their children. The father and mother who miss all this, who confide their infant charge to other hands, lose (it shall not be said a great pleasure since that is a matter of opinion) but a soul-fortifying influence for themselves. The watching, the inconvenience, the self-denial, all bear blessed fruits which no after kindness can, in like force, produce ; and the man and woman, whose faces are the first things their children can remember to have known, whose hands have guided their baby footsteps, and at whose knees they have been taught their



first prayer, have laid up for themselves a treasure which the world can neither give nor take away. Yet this is what nine out of ten resign when they accept a life in India, and for which ninety-nine out of a hundred, did they speak the truth, would confess that no wealth, or lack of trouble can repay them. Blessed little children ! blessed from the time that Divine hands were placed upon their heads and Divine lips pronounced them so ! the possession of them might have kindled life, and warmth, and sweet amenity in the character even of Mrs. Colonel Dowdson. But she had no such charm to brighten her existence ; the hours in little Fitz-Cavendish Street passed dully and cheerlessly one after the other, and her temper was becoming more snappish, and her remarks more bitter every day. But one morning, as Miss Diver was paying her usual “ duty ” visit, she happened to mention that she had met a certain Miss Coxwell, a person whom Mrs. Dowdson had known in Madras, and who was anxious to renew her acquaintance with her.

“ I told her you were quite alone here, and knew no one ; and she said she would be very glad to come and sit with you sometimes. Shall I tell her, she may call ? ” concluded Miss Diver, in a tone of friendly commiseration.

Mrs. Colonel Dowdson winced. Miss Coxwell had come out to Madras as governess to the children of the Governor, and in that condition she had noticed her, but always in a lofty and condescending manner, and with a full understanding of the difference existing between their relative positions. To hear therefore that she had been represented to Miss Coxwell, (whose health had compelled her to return to England some time before,) as friendless and forlorn—she, who when in India, had always been a centre of attraction—was anything but agreeable for poor Mrs. Dowdson, and at first, she was about to say that Miss Coxwell and herself moved in very different spheres of society, and she had no wish to continue her acquaintance.



But second thoughts intervened : those thoughts which if not always the best, are generally the wisest, and remembering the long intervals of dulness, by which Miss Diver's visits were divided, Mrs. Dowdson gave the required permission, although she could not help interlarding it with a little of her old stateliness, as she said that "if Miss Coxwell *very much* desired it, she should have no objection to receive her in Little Fitz-Cavendish Street."

Accordingly, a few days afterwards, Miss Coxwell was announced, and Mrs. Dowdson, with whom Véronique was seated at work, told the girl to take her basket, and needles, and threads into the next room, and leave the folding-doors open in case she needed her. For her French lady's-maid was one of the last remnants of Mrs. Dowdson's regality, and she still made the most of her on every occasion.

Véronique obeyed mechanically, for her heart was heavy, and her head was in a whirl, which condition had been brought about that morning by the following cir-

cumstance : Her mistress had given her leave, almost for the first time, to have a few hours to herself ; and eager to put into execution a design which she had long contemplated, Véronique, first ascertaining from the lodging-house servant what street was nearest to the address of the club left her by Gordon Romilly, had stepped into a cab, and caused herself to be driven to it. Strange as she was to London, she had no difficulty in finding the place she needed, but arrived there she did not know how next to proceed. Her intention had been to ask if Captain Romilly ever went to the club now, or if his address were known ; but when she came in sight of the large palatial-looking building with its frowning portico, and long flight of steps, every window of which seemed a framework for eager faces pressed forward to gaze at her graceful figure, and delicate feet and ankles, the heart of Véronique failed her, and fearful of the publicity and the apparent strangeness of such a request coming from her lips, she lingered about the precincts of

the club, going "round the house, and round the house," like the moon in the riddle, and "peeping in at every corner," but never daring to obtrude herself on the notice of any of the waiters who were lingering about the door.

At last, however, a neighbouring clock warned her that her time was nearly up, and fear lest she should never again have such an opportunity in some measure gained the mastery of her apprehension, so approaching the youngest and least awful-looking of the men-servants, she ventured in an agitated voice to whisper her request to him, begging him at the same time not to make it public.

The personal appearance of the applicant, added to the beseeching look in her large blue eyes, had quite melted the young waiter's heart, if it required softening, and after the delay of a few minutes, he returned to tell her that Captain Gordon Romilly *was* a member of that club, but that they had not his present address, and he was believed to be abroad.



“Oh! can't you tell me where?” said Véronique with eager excitement, as she clasped her hands imploringly together; but the man could give her no further information, and she was obliged to be content with what she had received.

He was alive then! she thanked God, and the Blessed Virgin, and all the holy angels for that! but if alive, why had he not written to her, nor returned to fetch her, and been content to think her dead, or to suppose her false to him, without having received a proper confirmation of the fact? This was what made the girl that afternoon both sad and joyful as she bent over her work; it was the mystery and the suspense which oppressed her, the doubt which for the first time had crept into her heart that her *Gor-don* could be careless, or unjust, or inconsiderate towards herself.

And yet he was alive; he lived! she should see him again! and her trust was still sufficiently strong to enable her to believe that to meet him was to be restored

to all that made life a glory to her. It was while she was in the midst of such meditations, that Miss Coxwell was admitted to the presence of Mrs. Dowdson, and after the first formality, consequent upon meeting after a lengthened separation, had rubbed off, the ladies became very familiar, and intimate with each other, and one by one the sayings and doings of their former acquaintances were submitted to the crucible of their opinion, and passed judgment upon.

Véronique listened to their conversation for some time with the utmost indifference, hearing without understanding it, dreaming as she was, meanwhile, of the subject which occupied her own heart, until her attention was arrested by a sentence from Miss Coxwell.

“My dear Mrs. Dowdson,” that lady was saying, (Miss Coxwell was a lively and affectionate rattle who dealt out her information much more generously than Miss Diver) “surely you must remember young Arkwright who was so much taken with

that plain little person, Mrs. Doveton, and whom, people *did* say, he followed to the hills by appointment. But oh, those hills! those hills! they are shocking places for scandal, shocking! shocking! I never listen to such stories, dear Mrs. Dowdson. When people tell me anything that is wrong, I close my ears, I refuse to hear it, for after all, what are we? Worms! liable to be traduced any day; and do we like it when it happens to ourselves? No, no! most emphatically no!" and here Miss Coxwell clasped her hands together to produce an effect corresponding to her words.

"But I do not think that people who conduct themselves respectably *are* traduced, Miss Coxwell!" observed Mrs. Colonel Dowdson.

She did not mind so much being called a "worm," because the Bible itself says we are all such, but she did not choose to be considered quite so low a worm as to be classed in the same sentence as Miss Coxwell.

"Oh, yes! they are," returned her



visitor, decidedly, (she had been somewhat of a martyr, herself, to the cause) “and it is but what we must all expect at times. There is very little charity in the world. As dear Sir Robert used to say to his girls,” (Sir Robert was the Madras Governor of whose acquaintance Miss Coxwell to the end of her small existence would never cease to boast), “charity, my dears, charity! whether ye eat, or whether ye drink, or whatever ye do, the greatest of these is charity,” with which new reading of the Apostle’s injunction, Miss Coxwell looked perfectly satisfied.

“But I have seen a great deal as you may imagine,” she continued after a pause, “mine has been a chequered career, dear Mrs. Dowdson, and it is my invariable rule to keep my eyes open and my mouth shut. You remember Mrs. Bradleigh, don’t you? She went home in the ‘Queen of the Wave,’ just about the time that young Romilly came out. I suppose you haven’t forgotten Captain Romilly?”

At this, the heart of Véronique, with a

great throb, altered its measure, and instead of proceeding in an orthodox and reasonable manner, kept leaping up and down with rapid and irregular jerks, which almost threatened to prevent her hearing what now she so ardently listened for.

“What Gordon Romilly, the aide-de-camp? oh, dear no! what of him?”

“Oh! I don’t know anything particular about him now, excepting that he is abroad, but I was going to tell you what he said of Mrs. Bradleigh.”

But Mrs. Dowdson had had almost enough of Miss Coxwell’s *rechauffée* of Madras scandal, and attempted to turn the conversation into another channel.

“Abroad, is he? why what can people find to take them so much abroad? I am sure he must have had enough of travelling.”

“Ah, one would think so! wouldn’t they? but he is at Brüssenburgh, and I came by the information in a very curious way too. Only fancy! I was walking



along Oxford Street a few weeks back, and on such a pelting day, I could hardly keep myself dry even with an umbrella, when I passed a trunk shop, and as I sadly wanted a new trunk—for the railway porters are really so careless, now-a-days, that they knock your boxes all to pieces for you—I thought I would just step in and—”

But what Miss Coxwell's further adventures with respect to her new trunk were, or how she arrived therefrom at the information that Gordon Romilly was at Brüssenburgh, Véronique never ascertained, for filled with exultation at what she had over-heard, she ventured by another door to leave her mistress's bedroom, and seek a refuge in her own from the burst of excited tears with which she could not help greeting the news she had acquired. At Brüssenburgh, in the very town of which he and Père Joseph had so often talked together, and which Gordon had said he would take the first opportunity of visiting again! that he should be at Brüssenburgh, seemed a confirmation of her brightest

hopes, for if her husband had forgotten or forsaken her, he never would have sought a spot where the thought of his deserted wife must intrude upon his memory each hour. Oh, no, no! it was some great mistake, some dreadful mystery which had kept them separate: she had but to meet him face to face, to look into his eyes, (those full, blue eyes of which she cherished so vivid a remembrance) to hear at once what had divided them and to have it swept away for ever. She must go to Brüssenburgh directly, she must not lose a single day in searching for another situation, and when with flushed cheeks, and swollen eyes but trembling with eager happiness, Véronique redescended to the sitting-room to find her mistress once more alone, she could not keep her information to herself another moment.

“Madame!” she exclaimed excitedly, without giving Mrs. Dowdson time to scold her for having absented herself without leave, “how soon will it be convenient for you to let me quit your service? I wish to

go to Belgium as soon as possible. My friends are waiting for me there!"

At this appeal Mrs. Dowdson was so completely taken aback that she knew not how to answer.

"Go to Belgium!" she ejaculated; "what are you talking about, Mar-rie? Of course you can't go to Belgium before I have done with you."

"But, Madame," said the girl more humbly, "I have been now for nearly a month in London; and my agreement with you was only for the voyage over. I had no intention of remaining in service after I had reached my destination. I wish to go to my mother's family at Rêve."

"Well, then, you *can't* go to your mother's family," returned her mistress, sharply, "I have not yet given you warning, and you must remain with me until I do. Of course I shall pay you wages, if that is what you are thinking about, but you cannot leave my service, at all events for some time to come. So that is settled, and let me hear no more about it."



But a stronger feeling than timidity was at work in the girl's breast now, and it enabled her to speak with decision.

“I *must* leave you, Madame. I do not wish to go until you have found another lady's-maid, but I must beg you to look out for one at once, and to let me seek a situation in some family going abroad.”

“Well, then, you shall do no such thing,” replied Mrs. Colonel Dowdson angrily. “This is like the usual gratitude of servants. I brought you over from India free of expense, and you repay my kindness by leaving me on the first opportunity. But I refuse to let you go, and if you quit this house without my permission you will forfeit all claim to your wages, or a character.”

Véronique looked aghast. She knew that in order to procure another situation she must have a good character from her present mistress, and if Mrs. Dowdson carried her threat into execution and refused to give her one, she might ruin her chance of re-meeting her husband.

At the prospect her heart sunk and her lips trembled. She was too near tears to be able to answer the Colonel's wife again, and with a breast throbbing with a sense of her injustice, she retired into the bedroom and resumed her needlework.

The evening passed as usual. The Colonel was at home, and no further allusion was made to the desire which had been expressed by Véronique; but it occupied her mind all the night long, and in the morning she descended to the sitting-room with heavy eyelids, and a face pallid from excitement and want of rest.

Mrs. Colonel Dowdson was not yet up—she seldom rose before breakfast now, and it was Véronique's duty to carry that meal to her in the bedroom—but her husband was sitting by the fire, and after a while he noticed the pale and wearied countenance of the lady's-maid, and asked her the reason of it.

Now the Colonel was rather a gay old gentleman; not indeed that his gallantries ever exceeded a chuck under the chin or a

squeeze of the waist of a pretty girl, but he had a youthful and sunny heart, and loved all that was fresh and young in a harmless and innocent way, and the childish look and manner of his wife's little maid had excited his sympathies from the very first. He did not like to see the tender curves of her mouth fall, nor the lights fade out from her quiet eyes, and he could not bear to hear her worried and scolded and taken to task just as the humours of his lady dictated to her. And this predilection on the Colonel's part, although so natural, had already provoked a few tart remarks from Mrs. Dowdson; for, notwithstanding his age and hers, she was as jealous of him on occasions as women *can* be when they know their own youthful charms have slipped away for ever.

“*Qu'as-tu, Marie,*” he said as he observed her woe-begone look, “*es-tu malade?*”

For the Colonel possessed a slight knowledge of French, and the fact of his sometimes speaking it when alone with Véro-



nique was another source of jealous discontent with Mrs. Dowdson.

“*Ce n'est rien, Monsieur,*” she replied, but the sadness of her tone belied her words; “*je suis un peu contrariée, voilà tout.*”

“And what has annoyed you?” he continued in the same language.

So then Véronique thought that he might stand her friend with Mrs. Dowdson; and in a rapid half-articulate voice, she detailed to him her great wish to join her friends in Belgium, and how her mistress had refused to give her permission to leave her service, or to let her have a character if she did so.

“And it seems a little hard to me, Monsieur,” she concluded, as she quietly brushed away the tears which had risen to her eyes, “because my agreement was only for the voyage home, and I have a right to ask to go.”

“Of course you have,” he answered, “and it shall be managed for you, my dear—don't be afraid of that. I will undertake to speak to Madame on the subject.”

They were standing at the window, side by side, looking out on the dull street, and as the Colonel spoke to her thus, Véronique lifted her tearful eyes to his face and thanked him warmly for his promised interference, and looked, as she performed the action, so innocent and so young that the old man's best feelings were roused. With no thought but such as a father might have entertained towards a daughter, he laid his hand upon her shoulder and kindly patted it.

“Colonel!” ejaculated the angry voice of Mrs. Dowdson from behind them, “what are you about? You ought to be *ashamed* of yourself!”

She had heard the whispering which was going on in the dining-room through the folding-doors, and, rising to set them open, that she might be certain no nefarious practices were enacted between the Colonel and Véronique during her seclusion, had been witness to the paternal manner by which the former attempted to soothe the distress of her lady's-maid. And there

she now stood, gaunt and grim, in a flannel dressing-gown, regarding them with looks of angry dismay, and ready to shower down vengeance on the offenders.

“Colonel, how *dare* you : and at your age, when you’ve scarcely a tooth in your head that’s not false ! And you too, you shameless, brazen-faced little hussy ; what do you mean by letting him pull you about in that manner ?”

“*Il n’a rien fait,*” said Véronique, coolly, piqued by her mistress’s false accusation into standing up for herself.

“Don’t you stop there, talking your gibberish to me !” exclaimed Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, vehemently, “you think, I dare say, because I can’t understand all the stupid French you speak together, that I have no eyes as well as no ears. But you are very much mistaken, I see a great deal more than you think for, and have done so all along, and I’ll have a stop put to it now, or my name is not Caroline Dowdson.”

“My dear, my dear !” interposed the luckless Colonel, “pray be a little more



moderate, you do not at all understand what you are talking about."

"That's what *you* think, Colonel," she replied in the same strain, "but if I am deaf, I am not blind, and I refuse to be insulted in my own house: and as for that girl there, she goes out of it this morning."

"I am going, Madame!" said Véronique, haughtily, as she turned towards the door. "It is what I asked of you yesterday: I am glad that you accord it me to-day."

"Yes, you *are* going," repeated her mistress, "and you are going without a character, and without wages, Miss Brazen Face; and if anyone comes to ask me the reason why, I shall tell them how you have been behaving with the Colonel."

"*Monsieur! ne dites plus rien, je vous en prie,*" said Véronique, who saw that the husband was about to expostulate with his wife's decision, "*je n'ai pas peur: le ciel veille sur moi.*"

With the insult thrown at her by Mrs. Dowdson, the girl's native dignity had replaced all her former submissiveness; when

simply remonstrated with, she had been a timid, tearful child, but unjustly accused, she became a proud and indignant woman, and it was with a look in her eyes before which even Mrs. Colonel Dowdson quailed, that she passed out of the sitting-room to her own apartment. She was determined that she would not stay another hour, she had half made up her mind to break her bonds before, and her mistress's present behaviour decided her. She packed up her small wardrobe in her box, and getting Phillis, who had always been her friend, to call her a cab, left the house without exchanging another word with Mrs. Dowdson. As she did so, and remembering that lady's nonchalant reception of the news of the real insult offered her by Mr. Palmer on board ship, compared it with her conduct of the morning, Véronique did not even feel sorry that she was quitting her without a farewell. She was only anxious to find herself clear of a service where the bread and water which she eat were made so bitter to her. But before the cab had gone



the length of the street it was suddenly hailed by a passing passenger, and on its stoppage, the kindly, troubled face of the Colonel was thrust in at the window.

“You are not really going so soon?” he said in a voice of consternation.

“I am, Monsieur,” was the quiet reply, “after what Madame said to me this morning, I will never break bread in her house again.”

“But where to, my child? You have no home, no friends in London. It is not fit that a girl should wander about the streets alone.”

“I shall not do that, Monsieur, I am going straight to the ‘Domestic Bazaar’ to procure service in some family crossing to Belgium.”

“But suppose you do not get it, Marie, where are you to go meanwhile? Servants wait for weeks sometimes before they can obtain a situation.”

“Do they?” she exclaimed, with widely dilated eyes, (she had made so sure, poor child, that to present herself at this magic

bazaar was to get what she desired) “oh, do they, really? what shall I do? what shall I do?”

“You must let me provide for you, Marie,” said Colonel Dowdson, pulling out his purse, “there are your wages, my dear,” laying a five pound note on her lap, (good Colonel, he had very few of them to spare) “and if you cannot hear of a situation to-day, you must let me know.”

“*Mais c'est trop, Monsieur, je ne veux pas le prendre!*” said Véronique, as she returned the bank-note which the Colonel had given her, “it is only for one month, remember, my passage money was paid for me.”

“Take it, take it,” he urged, attempting to replace it in her hands; but she held them behind her back.

“One sovereign, Monsieur, one sovereign, if you will be so kind, just that I may have a little money by me, but no more. If I need more, I promise I will ask you for it.”

“Very well,” he answered, “I suppose

it must be as you wish. But here is the address of my brother in Lincoln's Inn, Marie. If you have not obtained a situation by this evening, go to him and he shall find you a suitable lodging. I will speak to him about it at once. I wish I could do more for you, but you know how I am tied."

"You have done more than enough, Monsieur," she said, thankfully, "and for myself I have a strong hope that I shall obtain what I desire."

And then the Colonel shook hands with her kindly, and the cab rattled off once more towards the "Domestic Bazaar."

## CHAPTER II.

WITH MRS. CONWAY JONES.

THE "Domestic Bazaar" was a large, uninviting looking building, situated in a street, not far from Fitz-Cavendish Square, outside the door of which were displayed placards detailing the fees of admission, both for the searchers of servants, and situations.

Véronique entered the wide vestibule timidly, she was too little used as yet to the bustling world in which she found herself to mix in it with any degree of assurance, and had it not been that a clerk standing behind his books, in a sort of enclosed office, at the further end of the place, called to her sharply, desiring to know her business, she would probably have remained



close to the glass doors for some considerable time longer. Brought, however, to a recollection of what lay before her, though not emboldened by his address, she walked up to the small window through which his head had been thrust, and asked him in a low voice, if that were the place where servants came to be engaged.

“What situation?” he demanded briefly.

“Lady’s maid, Monsieur, or as *bonne* to little children; anything so that I can get a place quickly with some family going to Belgium. I want to cross to Brüssenburg, Monsieur, as soon as possible, all my mother’s family are there, and—”

“Well, well! that’s no affair of mine,” interrupted the man brusquely, “you must tell all that to the matron, when you see her. What name?” preparing to write it down as he spoke.

“Véronique Marie Moore, Monsieur,” she replied in a subdued voice.

“Half-a-crown, if you please!”

She tendered the sovereign given her by Colonel Dowdson, and received back such



a mass of silver, that, unfamiliar with English coin, she thought at first that it was impossible it could be all intended for her.

“Take your change!” said the clerk, pushing it towards her, together with a ticket inscribed with her name and number, “and go straight up those steps,” pointing to a flight at the other end of the vestibule, “and you will find the manager’s room. This fee entitles you to as many situations as you can get within the month. Now, Miss!” turning to a new comer, “what can I do for you?”

Véronique took her money, and following the direction given her by the clerk, presently found herself in a large carpeted room, in the centre of which was a table covered with writing materials, and two or three very respectable-looking women engaged with needlework, or books of reference, whilst round the sides of the apartment were placed narrow benches, at present occupied by some half-dozen girls waiting until their turn should come to

make their desires known, and one was standing up before the table, undergoing the process of examination.

Véronique, being motioned to a seat, sank silently down on the bench nearest to her, and listened attentively to what was going on, although her heart sunk as she heard the rigorous catechism to which the applicants for service were subjected.

“So your name is Ann Hodges?” said the head of the establishment to the woman, standing before her, “what is your age?”

“Thirty,” was the answer, given rather hesitatingly.

“Thirty, I don’t believe it; you are not telling me the truth; what is your real age?”

“Well, say twenty-five, then,” tardily admitted the domestic.

“I don’t think that you are even so much as that; you do not look more than twenty-one. However, we will put you down at twenty-five. With whom did you live last?”

“Mrs. Darnley, of 25, York Terrace.”

“For how long?”

“Three months, or a little under,” said the woman unwillingly.

“That’s no time for a character. Will she give you a good one?”

“She’s no call to do otherwise.”

“Why did you leave her?”

“Because we couldn’t agree together. She was always a worrying, and a fidgeting of me, so at last I gave her warning.”

“It’ll go against you, unless you have some better reason to give for quitting your situation. What wages do you ask?”

“Twenty pounds, and all found.”

“It’s too much; you won’t get it, particularly under the circumstances. You’d better say fifteen, if you want to get service quickly.”

“Very well,” said the servant reluctantly, “you can put me down as fifteen, with everything found, and no housework. And I shall leave Mrs. Darnley’s on the 3rd. of next month.”

“That you can settle with the lady who may engage you. Here is your ticket,” handing the girl a small card, “and the cooks’ room is to the right. Go in there, and wait until you are sent for.”

“I can’t stay above an hour,” remonstrated the woman, “I’ve got my dinner to dish up at five.”

“Well, you shall be sent for before the hour, if it is possible. Please to make way now for the next applicant. Why, Sarah Williams, are you back again? How many situations have we procured you during the last twelve months?”

“Don’t know, I’m sure,” replied the new comer, who was pretty and pert, “I keep no reckoning of ’em; but if they were all as bad as the last one, I think I’m well rid of the lot. Couldn’t stand her no ways: you sent me to a regular Tartar.”

“Who was it? let me see,” said the manager, as she turned the leaves of her book of references, “oh! Lady Carstairs; why I thought that was an excellent situation, Williams!”



“Oh! was it! I wish you'd have tried it yourself, ma'am, and then you'd know better. An old widow, with half-a-dozen sons, and some fresh fuss about 'em every day. I'm sure one couldn't look at the young gentlemen in passing, but she'd make out as 'twas a crime. There ain't one of us as wasn't sick of our lives there.”

“Oh! it was that, was it?” returned the other, with an intelligent smile, “well, I hope, notwithstanding, that her ladyship will give you a good character, Williams? You can't get on without it, you know.”

“Oh! she's safe to do that, for she can't say anything *real* against me—I defy 'er. Haven't you got no ladies'-maids' places open at present, ma'am?”

“Mrs. Conway Jones wants another!” observed the matron quietly.

“Oh! then she won't get me,” retorted Miss Williams quickly, “I don't mind work, but I likes my wages. No others on the list?”



“Yes, several; but I don’t think any of the ladies are here this morning. However, go into the room, and I’ll see about it presently. And so you are for the nursery,” she continued as Williams flounced away, and a simple, countrified-looking girl took her place; and then the same sort of catechism commenced over again, and continued till Véronique’s turn had arrived, and she took up her station before the inquisitorial table. She was quite worn-out by that time, being the last on the list, weary of sitting on the hard unyielding bench, and disheartened at hearing the stress which had been laid in each case, on the necessity of having an irreproachable character, and when she advanced to answer the questions which might be put to herself, her look of fatigue struck the matron.

“You are very tired,” she said gently as she took the ticket from her hand and read the name and number inscribed on it.

“I am, indeed, Madame,” replied Véro-

nique, into whose eyes the tears had nearly rushed at a word of kindness, "and I have been very unfortunate. I don't know what you will say to my story."

"Let us begin in order. You are foreign, are you not?"

"Partly so, Madame! I speak French better than English."

"And what situation have you been filling?"

"That of lady's-maid; but I will be a nurse or anything in order to get abroad. I want to go to Belgium at once to join my own people. I want to go to Brüssenburg. All my family live there."

"Oh! you wish to travel. What wages do you ask?"

"I have never thought about wages, Madame."

The matron opened her eyes, and then Véronique detailed to her how she had made the voyage to England with Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, and how that lady had turned her out of the house that morning at a moment's notice.

“But she will give you a character, I suppose,” said her questioner.

“I am afraid not, Madame,” replied the girl dropping her voice and her eyes. “I am sure the Colonel would speak a good word for me, but Mrs. Dowdson said I should have neither character nor wages from her.”

“And she turned you out, at your age, without means of support or protection into the streets? What a shame! But the gentleman’s speaking for you would be simply no use at all, and sorry as I am to say it, I must tell you that without a character there is no chance whatever of your obtaining a situation anywhere. Ladies have been so often deceived that they are getting more particular every day, and under these circumstances I couldn’t venture even to send you to speak to one.”

“Oh! Madame! pray don’t say that,” exclaimed Véronique clasping her hands in an agony of tears, “only think! I have no where to go to, I am not even familiar

with the ways or the streets of London, and I have not sufficient money to travel to Brüssenburgh by myself, even did I know how to set about it.”

She looked so unlike the style of women who generally presented themselves in the Domestic Bazaar, that her appearance had excited the interest of the matron and her coadjutors from the first moment of their seeing her; and now, as the genuine distress which she was suffering was depicted on her countenance and apparent from the inflexion of her voice, they gathered about her, begging her not to agitate herself, and they would do their utmost to give her help.

“Your chief object is to get abroad, is it not?” demanded one of them; “wages, I suppose, would be a secondary consideration with you.”

“Oh! quite—quite—” said Véronique excitedly, “but I must go to Brüssenburgh, Madame, all my friends are there; here I am utterly alone; I shall have no rest until I get to Brüssenburgh.”



“Mrs. Conway Jones,” suggested one of the women in a low voice to the others.

“But without a character?” enquired the matron. “She is always so very particular.”

The first speaker laughed.

“I suppose she finds it awkward being without anything of the kind about her,” and then they all three laughed, and the matron said, “for shame,” and told them they must be more careful.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do for you,” she continued turning to Véronique, “I know a lady, a very kind lady, but not very rich, who is going abroad at once, and I believe to the very place you mention, and if you like I will send you to her with a letter explaining how it is that you have no character, and, perhaps, as she is in a great hurry, she may overlook the circumstance and take you on trial, at all events as far as Brüssenburgh. Should you know what to do with yourself if you once got there?”

“*Oh ! oui, Madame, parfaitement bien,*”

exclaimed Véronique, lapsing into French in her pleasure and excitement, "I mean, that can I but once get there, I shall have no more fear for myself; it is happiness too great to think of."

To be at Brüssenburgh was to be near her husband, and in hourly expectation of meeting him; and the joy which irradiated the features of Véronique at the thought, struck her spectators as not a common joy.

"And you will not be very particular about your wages then; I don't mean what you ask her," continued the matron, "for Mrs. Conway Jones always gives twenty pounds a year to her lady's-maid; but about having them regularly paid. Mr. Conway Jones is a gentleman in no particular profession," (here both the other women burst out laughing again) "and you may have to wait for your money sometimes. I think it right to warn you of this, as some servants anticipate their wages, and such a course might lead you into trouble."

"Oh! I care for nothing—for nothing,

Madame, except to get to Brüssenburg," said Véronique, "and I thank you exceedingly for the trouble you have taken for me. I am very grateful, Madame," and as she thus concluded the girl stooped down and kissed the matron's hand.

The good woman was confounded; she was not used to such demonstrations on the part of the cooks, and housemaids, and nurses who appeared before her regularly for situations, and it made her feel quite uncomfortable. She turned hastily away to her desk, and writing the promised recommendation thrust it into Véronique's hand, with an injunction to lose no time about seeing after the place, as if she waited till the afternoon Mrs. Conway Jones would most probably be out.

"And if she should not engage you, my dear, or be already suited, come back here any time before four o'clock, and I will see what I can do about getting you a bed for the night.—I've taken quite a fancy to her pretty face," she said to her own friends as Véronique, after overwhelming her with



thanks for her kindness, turned to leave the bazaar, "she looks much more fit for a lady than a servant; and I'd like to see the woman whipped who let her leave her house without a home to go to. I think Mrs. Conway Jones will take her, for as she is to remain abroad, it will be much easier to send her adrift than a girl who wished to return to England; but if the child ever sees the colour of her money she will be cleverer than most that have gone before her."

"I should think so," acquiesced the other women, and then they returned to business, and the interest they had conceived for Véronique was superseded.

Meanwhile, with a heart like a feather, so eager is youth to look on the bright side of things, Véronique had hailed a passing cab, and directed the driver to take her to the address indicated on her letter of introduction to Mrs. Conway Jones—150, Rutland Gate, Hyde Park Corner—where, having arrived, and intimated on what errand she had come, she was ordered to



sit down on one of the hall chairs, emblazoned with the crest and arms of Mr. Conway Jones, and there wait until the lady's pleasure with respect to receiving her should be ascertained.

The family was evidently making preparations for a move, for the hall was full of packing cases, and the man-servant who had opened the door to her, wore a holland apron over his livery, and was further ornamented with wisps of straw, but as Véronique glanced around her at the carved oaken table, the bronze whip stand, and the stags' antlers with which the place was decorated, and remembered what she had been told with respect to the owner of it, she wondered that the matron at the Domestic Bazaar could have called Mrs. Conway Jones "poor," and when she was shewn up the handsomely carpeted staircase to an exquisitely fitted morning-room, she marvelled at the expression still more.

Mrs. Conway Jones, attired in a French wrapper, and engaged with the perusal of a French novel, was lying on a sofa, looking

very lazy and extremely lady-like. She was a woman of from thirty to five-and-thirty, but although she had pretty features, and a faultless figure, her complexion was so faded and yellow, and her scanty hair so untidily arranged, that at first sight Véronique took her for several years older. She raised her eyes languidly as the girl entered the room, and having regarded her for a few moments in silence, during which time Véronique was blushing violently, she tapped the open letter she held in her hand and said, with a slight lisp, which Mrs. Conway Jones had affected because she thought it sounded interesting, until she was unable to break herself of the habit—

“ I suppose you are the young woman of whom the matron speaks in this note!” (at which Véronique curtsied and said “yes,”) “ Well! of course you must be aware that it is rather a serious thing taking a servant without a character. I have always made a point of being extremely particular about the characters of my domestics, and especially my lady’s-maids, and if I

overlook the deficiency in your case, it will be solely because Mrs. What's her name, the matron, lays such a stress on my doing so."

"She is very good," stammered Véronique, "and indeed, Madame, I *ought* to have had a character, for I served my last mistress faithfully; but she was a lady of very strange temper occasionally, and—"

"Oh! yes, yes! I can understand all that without your telling me," interrupted Mrs. Conway Jones, "and I hate to hear anything about old women and their vagaries. How soon could you come to me?"

"I can come at once, Madame. I shall be thankful to come at once, for I have nowhere to go to, even for to-night."

"Very well, you can stay here now if you like, for my last maid behaved very badly to me, and left the house without giving me any warning. I suppose you know that we are going abroad, and almost immediately, but as Mr. Conway Jones is connected with the ministerial affairs of the



country, his movements are always uncertain, and what he proposes to do must never be made public. Now, remember what I say to you ! the other servants know that business may soon call their master from London, but they are not aware when, nor the place we are bound for, and you must not disclose it to them. Perhaps you know that this is always the case with gentlemen employed under Government ; their motto is—Secresy and dispatch.”

Véronique had not known it, but the information greatly raised her future master in her opinion, and she promised Mrs. Conway Jones that she would not breathe a word upon the subject to anyone.

“I was compelled to tell the matron of the Bazaar,” continued that lady, “because I cannot travel without a servant ; but did Mr. Conway Jones know that I had done so, he would never forgive me, although I bound her over to secresy. What wages do you ask ?”

“Would you think twenty pounds a year too much, Madame ?” demanded



Véronique, hesitatingly, although she had not forgotten the matron's injunction on that subject.

“Oh dear no!” replied Mrs. Conway Jones, with the most perfect indifference, “I will give you twenty pounds, and everything found, with pleasure; but it must be on the understanding that you are ready to start with me at a moment's notice, and that you whisper nowhere of your master's affairs.”

“Oh dear no! Madame! indeed I will not, I hope you trust me!” exclaimed Véronique, elated at the prospect which had opened before her. “I will serve you faithfully both here and abroad, and I will never leave you until you have suited yourself with another lady's-maid.”

“Very well!” lisped Mrs. Conway Jones, as she returned to the perusal of her French novel, as a signal that the interview was concluded, “I will take all that for granted until I find it otherwise. If you serve me well, of course I shall keep you, and if you don't, I shall send you away. And, mean-

while, I hope you will not forget that I have taken you without a character, and that therefore it behoves you to be the more careful to obey me in the matter I have mentioned."

"You may depend on my discretion, Madame," answered Véronique, fervently, and then having obtained permission from her new mistress to return and inform the matron at the Domestic Bazaar that she had got the situation, she prepared to quit her presence.

"You had better go down first and get your dinner in the servants' hall," said Mrs. Conway Jones, "and then you can take a couple of hours, in which to do as you desire."

Borne up all day as she had been by her excitement and anxiety, Véronique had yet terribly felt the want of the food which she had not given herself time to procure; and it was with thankfulness that she found her way down to the kitchen, where a savoury dinner was being laid out for the benefit of the servants.

“If you please,” she said, addressing the cook, who was busy dishing it up, “I am the new lady’s-maid, and Mrs. Conway Jones told me to come down here and have dinner with you.”

“Lor, now, are you?” ejaculated the good-tempered-looking greasy creature as she surveyed the little figure standing on the threshold of the kitchen; “very well, my dear, it’s all right; come along, John will be down in a minute, and then we’ll begin.”

Véronique advanced timidly, and took up her station at the table. Although she had already tasted the sweets of service, she had never yet been brought in close contact with those who had been bred up to it from infancy, and little pride as she maintained in furthering the object she had in view, she rather shrunk from the familiar address of the cook, and the close neighbourhood of her portly person.

“And so she’s engaged you, has she?” continued that worthy. “John told me as there was a gal come to speak to her about

the place ; but I didn't think she'd take such a chick as you. Why, you don't look much older than her own daughter."

"Oh, are there children here?" asked Véronique quickly, for she loved little children, as all true women do.

"Oh, bless you, no! not here. They're all at school, poor things, from the biggest to the youngest, and were put out at nurse before that. Mrs. Conway Jones ain't a lady as cares about children, nor any other sort of nuisance, as you'll find out for yourself before long. She likes to take her ease too well for that."

"And does she never see them, then?"

"Yes, in once and a way. They come home about every month to spend the afternoon, and they stop down in the kitchen all the time along of me, and make pasties to take back with them. There's four of 'em, all gals, and don't care for their mother no more than I do."

"How very sad," said Véronique, to whom the tie between mother and child (perhaps because she had never known what



it was to have a mother of her own), appeared the most sacred thing this earth possessed.

“What is sad?” demanded the manservant, who now made his appearance, and took the seat next to Véronique. “Your servant, Miss—I suppose by seeing you here that you and the old lady have come to terms, and we are to have the honour of your company always. I am very glad to hear it.”

Véronique shrunk from this address even more than she had done from that of the cook, and at first she was going to resent it, but remembered herself in time. She was a servant, sitting at the servants' dinner table. She had no right to find fault with any kindly feeling expressed towards her; she ought rather to be grateful for it. Yet, as she felt the rings against her heart, the rings given her by Gordon Romilly, and which she no longer dared wear upon her fingers—she shuddered and was silent.

“She has engaged you, Miss, hasn't she?” re-demanded the footman.

“Yes,” replied Véronique, making an effort to overcome her repugnance, “and as Mrs. Conway Jones is without a lady’s-maid, I am to enter on her service at once. I hope it is a good one,” she added enquiringly.

“Oh, lor! yes—well enough!” responded the cook; “she flies out at times, but they all do that—have a bit of rabbit-pie, my dear; perhaps you don’t like stewed beef; you’re not eating hearty—and she’s very fond of change; you’re the fourth lady’s-maid she’s had in a twelvemonth.”

“Why did the last one go, cook?”

“Well, I can hardly tell you. She was a spiritty gal, and she and Missus were always fighting together; so one day she went off without any warning, and Master, he wasn’t for paying her wages, but she had him up to the court and got them out of him. Oh, she was a spiritty gal as ever you see, was Maria. She wouldn’t stand any of their nonsense, and no more will I. They’re awful backward with their wages sometimes in this house, but I insists upon

mine to the day ; and if they make a fuss about it, I say I'll leave, and that always brings them down. Master wouldn't go without his dinner for one day for any number of pounds."

"But why should they be backward," demanded Véronique ingenuously, "when they are so rich? They cannot have any lack of money. Look what a quantity it must have taken to pay for all the beautiful things with which this house is furnished!"

At this both her hearers laughed so loudly and coarsely and lengthily, that her cheeks became suffused at the idea of being the subject of their merriment.

"Lor! my dear," shouted the cook, "you've no call to redden up after that fashion; but, bless your innocence, and may you never be the wiser—so say I."

"But aren't they paid for?" enquired Véronique, as the probable truth suddenly flashed across her.

"Well, Miss," said the footman, "it is safest to tell no tales; but I'd rather have all the money they owe than that as they've



got. However, I daresay yours and mine is safe, so it's no business of ours."

"And are we, then, the only servants?" said the girl, as for the first time it struck her that for so large a house they were a very small party.

"Well, we are at present ; but I believe Missus's name is down on the books of every bazaar in London to get others. We were five the week before last, but Maria, the lady's-maid, left, as cook told you ; and Jane, the housemaid, went, because she said she was sick of asking for her wages and getting nothing but excuses, and Missus sent the boy away because she wants a bigger one. And I'm to take my holiday to-morrow, cook ; so you'll have to do without me for a day or so."

"Well, she must have in a char-woman then, for I can't go muddling after the housework, and I don't suppose Miss here will. You didn't engage to clean the rooms and answer the bell for her, I'll warrant !"

"I shouldn't mind doing it, to make myself useful until the new house-maid comes,"



replied Véronique; and then, turning to the man, she continued—"what is in those large cases you were packing in the hall?" for she wished to find out if the servants knew that of which their mistress supposed them to be ignorant.

"Oh! only some pictures and 'objects of virtue,' which Missus is sending down to her sister in the country," he said indifferently. "They're always having in a lot of trash here, and carting it off again—and that reminds me that I must go back to work, if I'm to get them finished before their dinner time."

Upon which the two rose from table, and Véronique, although rather startled by the revelations which had been made to her, hastened with a grateful heart to tell the matron at the Domestic Bazaar of her success, and to write a little humble note of thanks to Colonel Dowdson, addressed to the care of his brother in Lincoln's Inn Fields, in which she informed him of the same circumstance.

## CHAPTER III.

### A SUDDEN START.

HAVING despatched her business, Véronique hastened back to Rutland Gate, and was about to ring the area bell, as the cook had informed her she would be expected to do on demanding ingress, when she saw that the front door stood ajar, and thinking to save trouble by entering that way, she quietly pushed it open, and stepped into the hall.

“Do you belong to this 'ere 'ouse?” loudly demanded a rough voice, as she set her foot in it; and Véronique turned in amazement, to encounter the burly figure of a butcher, who, arrayed in the blue blouse customary to his species, and with

his cap upon his head, was occupying one of the hall chairs, and regarding her with a look of insolent defiance.

“I am the lady’s-maid,” she answered, nervously, as she attempted to pass him.

“Oh! the lady’s-maid, are yer?” re-echoed the man, with a coarse laugh, “and where’s the *lady*, pray? I should like to know that. To my thinking, there ain’t no ladies in this ’ouse, nor gentlemen, either! When did you last get your wages, my dear? You’d better by far come and take service with my old woman than with such gentlefolks as these. You’d have justice there, if nothing else. *Gentlefolks!*” he continued, with a withering sneer, and raising his voice so that the remark might have been heard at the very top of the house, “gentlefolks! they ain’t nothing of the sort; they’re a pack of swindlers, who rob honest men of their earnings: and I’ll have the law of them before a month’s over my head, or my name’s not Josiah Griffin.”

“Hush! oh, pray hush!” exclaimed Véronique, terrified at the man’s words,

and not knowing what to think of the menacing gestures, by which they were accompanied, and it was to her infinite relief that the next moment she saw the head of the footman appear above the kitchen stairs.

“Now, when are you going to clear out of this?” he said, as he advanced towards the butcher, “we can’t have you sitting here all day, you know; it’s getting on for six o’clock, and I shall have to bring up the dinner presently.”

“Bring it up!” exclaimed the man, loudly, “it’s my beef and my mutton—I’ve a better right to fall to it than they have, and I don’t leave this house till they’ve paid me for it.”

“You’d better come again to-morrow morning,” urged the footman, “you won’t see the master this evening, because he’s gone out, and he won’t be back till late.”

“That’s a lie!” returned Mr. Griffin, curtly. “However, early or late, I waits for him here; and you keep your advice, my cockrel, until you’re asked for it. I don’t wish to have no words with you.



Like master, like man! If you was an honest fellow yourself, you wouldn't take service with a pack of swindlers."

"Come! none of that," replied the footman, hotly; and in the midst of the noisy quarrel which ensued, Véronique was thankful to hear the voice of her mistress calling her over the banisters.

"Moore! Moore!" she lisped, in the most dulcet of tones, "come to me; I want you."

Notwithstanding the unfamiliar appellation, Véronique guessed for whom it was intended, and running lightly up the staircase, encountered Mrs. Conway Jones upon the landing, but so transfigured from what she had appeared that morning, that had the girl not recognised her voice, she would hardly have known that it was she.

Her figure, now in the very zenith of its perfection, was admirably shown off by a tight fitting dress of black silk, about which was disposed a profusion of lace: her hair, to which a considerable addition had been made, was fashionably dressed, and on her

cheeks and brow appeared, if not the lilies and roses of youth, at least the best semblance to them which has been yet discovered ; whilst the dark lines drawn beneath her eyes, and the coral touch she had bestowed upon her lips, made her look, at a little distance, like a woman of four or five-and-twenty.

The start given by her unsophisticated maid upon first sight of her, caused the slightest tinge of natural colour to rise to the lady's face, but it was not apparent through her rouge, and the next moment she had recovered her temporary confusion, and drawn Véronique after her into the shelter of the drawing-room from which she had emerged.

It was not empty ; by the fire-place stood a middle-aged gentleman, whom Véronique —until she was undeceived by their subsequent conversation — mistook for Mr. Conway Jones.

“ Moore !” exclaimed her mistress, as soon as they had reached the drawing-room, “ there is a horrid man below, who says he

wants to see Mr. Conway Jones, and he cannot do so this evening—it is quite impossible—but he will not listen to me or to John, or to any one. Do go down and see what you can do with him! Tell him that your master is gone into the country for a few days, and that I have no change in the house with me to-night, but that I will send the money for his bill round the first thing in the morning; and do impress upon him Moore, that Mr. Conway Jones is out of town, and that if he sits there till midnight it is quite impossible that he can see or speak with him.”

Véronique did not like the task of being sent to do battle with the defrauded and belligerent butcher, nor to tell him what she believed to be a falsehood, but she said “very well, Madame,” and was about to try her best, when the middle-aged gentleman interfered.

“This is scarcely a fit case to be settled by a woman,” he said, “Let me go and speak to the fellow, my dear Mrs. Jones,

and I will engage that he shall leave the house without further trouble."

He put his hand in his waistcoat pocket as he spoke.

"Oh! but my *dear* Sir Henry!" exclaimed the lady, expostulatingly, "I couldn't, really—it is too much—you shall not be exposed to the insults of such a barbarian! Let Moore speak to him, it will all be arranged to-morrow morning," closing her eyes and nodding her head, "and meanwhile he will doubtless hear reason, and go home to his own people."

But notwithstanding her apparent earnestness, Véronique could not help thinking, she hardly knew why, that Mrs. Conway Jones did not intend the gentleman to take her at her word, and he seemed to think the same.

"The man will not insult me," he answered, quietly, "and you must really allow me the pleasure of settling this little business for you—it is only what Jones would do, were he at home."

"Oh! of course! of course!" rejoined



the lady, and again Véronique, catching the look of intelligence which passed between her and Sir Henry, thought that she was purposely misleading her; "well then, if you *will* have your own way, I suppose you must, but it is only a loan till to-morrow morning, mind!"

"Only till to-morrow morning!" he repeated lightly after her, and then he went down-stairs to settle Mr. Griffin's account, and Mrs. Conway Jones turned to Véronique.

"Moore!" she said, hurriedly, "would you mind helping John to wait at table this evening? I daresay I shall not have to ask you to do such a thing again; but Sir Henry is going to stay to dinner, and Mr. Conway Jones is so very particular that everything should be nicely served when we have friends with us. It is, of course, the housemaid's business, but I was obliged to part with mine about a fortnight ago, and have not yet replaced her."

Véronique assured her that she had no objection whatever to make herself useful

in any way, and was only afraid that she knew too little of the business in question to be of much service in it.

“Oh! yes! you will; if you will do what John tells you, and run backwards and forwards to the kitchen for him. Thank you, Moore; I shall be so much obliged to you, you can't think. I don't know what we should have done without you.”

Mrs. Conway Jones always paid her dependents for their services in a profusion of thanks, couched in the softest words, which although they could not quite atone to them for the want of the baser but more substantial coin, had yet the power to make them stay longer with her, and depart more quietly than they would otherwise have done.

On the present occasion, as Véronique heard her acknowledge her promised aid in so sweet and silvery a voice, she thought her new mistress was one of the pleasantest ladies she had ever spoken to, and with alacrity she flew up-stairs to her bed-room,

to arrange her dress and hair against the time when she should be required.

In another hour the dinner was on the table, and standing by the sideboard, as John directed her to do, she watched eagerly for the entrance of her master, whom, from all she had heard of him, she was very curious to behold. Sir Henry, as was natural, came first, with Mrs. Conway Jones upon his arm, and Mr. Conway Jones, with an eye-glass in his eye, followed them, in rather a subdued manner, which, however, brightened up as soon as he caught sight of the pretty face which beamed upon him from the sideboard.

“By Jove! Cissy, my darling!” he said, as he took his seat at the end of the table, “the new importation is rather an improvement on the last one, eh?—that’s a regular pair of piercers, Cleveland, and no mistake! they’d go through a deal board, and transfix a man the other side of it.”

“I wish you’d be a little more guarded in what you say,” observed his wife, quietly,



“you seem to imagine no one has ears but yourself, Conway.”

“Oh, no, I don't, my darling!” he rejoined, with a slight chuckle, as still, with the glass in his eye, without which he could see to do nothing, he bent his head over the table, rapidly gabbled grace, and proceeded to help the fish before him.

As soon as the course was served, Véro-nique, who was perfectly innocent that the foregoing conversation alluded to herself, had time to observe her mistress's husband, and was struck by the foreign look which he presented. He was a slight dark man, with handsome features of the Jewish type, and with the exception of a small moustache and imperial, he wore his face close-shaved, which added to his un-English appearance. He had quick, restless eyes, which were never still, but always either looking up or down, or roving round the apartment, and he betrayed a nervous, unsettled manner, as though he momentarily expected to hear the report of a pistol close to his ear. Yet with it all he seemed a facetious and laugh-



ter-loving gentleman, who made jests on almost everything about him ; and he invariably addressed his wife as “ Cissy, my darling ! ” from which fact Véronique inferred that he must be very fond indeed of her.

Their guest, Sir Henry Cleveland, was much more silent ; he did not seem to enter into the jokes with the same spirit as Mr. Conway Jones, and when he made a remark, it was usually to his hostess, and often in so low a voice, that only she could hear it.

Yet her husband did not seem to resent this monopolisation of his wife, or permit it to have any effect upon his appetite ; on the contrary, he ate more than Véronique had thought it possible one person could do, and in a greedy, self-absorbed manner, as though his whole soul had gone, for the time being, into his dinner.

At last, however, even Mr. Conway Jones had finished, and the dessert being placed on the table, Véronique accompanied her fellow-servant down below, where, to

her astonishment, he threw himself into a chair, and laying his head on the table, gave vent to a prolonged fit of uncontrollable laughter.

“Lor! John! whatever’s come over you?” exclaimed the cook, beginning to shake her fat sides in sympathy with his merriment, even before she had heard the cause, “they’ll hear you upstairs, as sure as eggs is eggs.”

“I don’t care what they hear,” was the irreverent answer, “Good Lord! to stand beside that table is enough to kill a man—I shall never get over it—I shall rupture a blood-vessel if it goes on much longer! Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!” and off he went again into a peal of laughter which was almost hysterical.

“What’s up now?” said the cook, as she appealed to Véronique, who was laughing also, though only at the absurd appearance presented by the footman.

“I am sure I don’t know,” she answered, “I saw nothing out of the common way—but then I’m a stranger here.”

“ Yes, that’s just it !” exclaimed John, as he rallied from his second attack, “ you’re not up to it all, or you’d be as amused as I am. Why, Mrs. Hodson,” he continued, turning to face the cook, as he brought down his fist on the table, “ if there wasn’t that fellow apologising to Sir Henry for the silver with which the table was laid, and telling the mistress it was such a d—d old fashioned pattern they must change it for something newer, ‘ But we’ve put it off as long as we can,’ he says, ‘ because it’s old family plate, and we’re fond of it.’ And it’s Sir Henry’s all the time,” exclaimed the footman, bursting into a fresh peal of delight, “ his own man brought it here the last time their things were grabbed ; and he apologised to him for its being so d—d old and ugly looking. Oh ! I say, Mrs. Hodson ! or you, Miss, there, do come and pat me on the back, or I shall go off into the high strikes. Old family plate ! and they didn’t like to exchange it because their mothers left it to them—ain’t it affecting ?” and with one

pathetic look at his amused hearers, John buried his face again from mortal view.

“But if,” demanded Véronique, after they were a little more composed, “if Sir Henry Cleveland lent the silver to the mistress, how is it that Mr. Conway Jones does not know of it?”

“Oh, you innocent!” exclaimed the cook, “Mrs. Conway Jones is one pusson in this house, and Mr. Conway Jones, he’s another, as you’ll find out before long. And Mrs. Jones, she has her friends, and Mr. Jones, he has——”

“None!” interposed the footman.

“Lor! nor don’t deserve to,” replied Mrs. Hodson. “And now, John, you just go and find out whether they’ll have tea or coffee to-night, for I must be getting it ready.”

The attendance of Véronique was not again required in the drawing-room that evening, for which she was sorry, as what she had heard had greatly piqued her curiosity to further watch the behaviour of Mr. and Mrs. Conway Jones; but she had



not the opportunity, and as she was much fatigued, she retired to rest early.

When she descended the next morning, she found Mrs. Hodson considerably put out, and on enquiring the reason, learnt that the footman, having obtained his master's permission to leave the house for his three days' holiday as soon as he chose to do so, had already taken his breakfast and his departure; added to which her mistress had ordered her to go all the way to Covent Garden, just to fetch a "rubbishing vegetable" on which she had set her heart, and which she declared was not to be procured fit to eat anywhere nearer.

"Sich stuff!" exclaimed the irate cook, "as if every greengrocer as is hadn't got sea-kale at this time of year, good enough for her Majesty the Queen, if she wished to dine off it. And here am I, with none of my day's work even begun, to tramp off miles, just to buy two pennorth of greens. How's the dinner to be got ready without me, I should like to know?"

“ Won’t you be home before that ?” said Véronique timidly.

“ Why, yes, child, in course I shall ; but I walk very slowly at my age, and it takes me a good two hours to get to the market and back. And on this day of all others, when that fellow, John, has had the impudence to go off and leave the silver just as he brought it down last night. It’s reg’lar inconsideration of the mistress, and so I tell her !”

“ Could I clean the silver for you ?” suggested Véronique.

“ Oh, there’ll be a ‘ char ’ here presently to do all that ; don’t you go to trouble yourself, my dear. But why I should be sent trapesing at this time of the morning after ‘ chars ’ and sea-kale I can’t imagine. ’Twould serve her right if she didn’t get any dinner at all to-day.”

And grumbling at her mistress, and her ill destiny, Mrs. Hodson commenced to prepare the breakfast, whilst Véronique, hearing the sound of the bed-room bell, ran up to answer it.

Mr. Conway Jones was in his dressing-room, but Mrs. Conway Jones was still in bed, looking as faded, as yellow, and as *passée* as she had done on Véronique's first introduction to her.

“What o'clock is it?” she demanded languidly, and on being told, continued—“well, you may bring my breakfast up to me here, Moore, for I have some business to do to-day which necessitates my rising earlier than usual, so it will not be worth while going into the boudoir.” And then as the girl, having received the orders for the meal, was about to leave the room and communicate them to the cook, her mistress added, rather hurriedly—“Have you unpacked your box yet, Moore?”

“No, Madame,” replied Véronique; “I was about to ask your permission to do so, after you had risen and had your breakfast.”

“Well, don't do it yet,” said Mrs. Conway Jones in the same unsettled manner, “for I have something to say to you about your room first. And tell Hodson, Moore,



to send up her master's breakfast into the dining room as soon as possible, for I am anxious she should start for the market directly afterwards, and take her time about it. It is a long walk there and back for the poor thing," and Mrs. Conway Jones sank on her pillows, with such a compassionate sigh, that Véronique wondered, since she was so well aware of the toil, that she inflicted it on such a busy day.

The breakfasts were duly served however, and then Véronique assisted her mistress in her dressing, and Mrs. Hodson, still grumbling loudly, departed on her errand in search of charwomen and sea-kale, and the grand house, save for its master and mistress and the lady's-maid, was left empty.

Upon which the bed-room bell again rang loudly, and Véronique, on answering it, was surprised to see that Mrs. Conway Jones, who had seized the opportunity of her absence to apply those last fond touches to her face without which she never appeared in public, had once more blossomed



into girlhood, and was standing in her bonnet and mantle, ready arrayed for going out.

“Moore!” she said quickly, “is that woman Hodson gone?”

“Yes, Madame!” replied Véronique, “she left the house ten minutes ago.”

“Very well, run up stairs and put on your bonnet and shawl. Your box is just as you brought it, is it not?”

“Yes, Madame!” stammered Véronique, “but—but——”

“I told you yesterday that we might have to go abroad at a moment’s notice,” returned the lady rather sharply, “and you agreed to do so. Come! don’t stand staring there. Go at once and put such articles in your box as you may have taken out; your master has gone to fetch a cab, and will be back directly.”

“But, Madame—your own things!” said Véronique, looking around the room in vain for any signs of preparation for travelling; “what will you do without any dresses?”

“They have all gone on,” replied Mrs.

Conway Jones ; “and what I require for the night I have in my bag. Now, lose no more time, if you please, for we must start directly, and Mr. Jones shall carry down your box when it is ready.”

Bewildered at the suddenness of the order, feeling that something must be wrong, and yet ready to brave anything rather than the risk of being left behind, Véronique flew to do as she was bidden, and had not been in her room five minutes before she heard the voice of her master demanding admittance, and asking if her box were ready to be taken down stairs.

“See what it is to be attached to the household of a man in the diplomatic service,” he remarked facetiously, as he shouldered her little trunk and walked away with it, “we are here to-day, and gone to-morrow. Just follow your mistress into the cab, Moore, and make no remarks. We don’t want all the world to know where we are going, or I may get into a scrape with the Government.”

Impressed with which idea, Véronique

remained as mute as a mouse, (although she could not help wondering if her mistress had remembered to leave any explanation of her absence for the poor cook when she should return from Covent Garden Market,) and Mr. Conway Jones having slammed the hall-door of No. 150, Rutland Gate behind him, jumped into the cab, and gave directions that they should be driven to the station of the London, Chatham, and Dover Railway.

“By Jove! that’s neatly done, Cissy my darling,” he said as he rubbed his hands together, and looked full into the face of his wife, “very neatly done—by Jove! The scoundrels won’t track us this time in a hurry. I was determined to have no repetition of the last escapade, with an interval of two minutes only, between embarkation and the prospect of board and lodging at Her Majesty’s expense.”

But Mrs. Conway Jones was more discreet than her husband, and only answered with a warning look, which he did not choose to take.



“By Jove!” he continued chuckling. “By Jove, Cissy my darling, only fancy the face of old Hodson when she comes back from market, and finds that we are flown. I’d give a pound to see it, by Jove! I’d give a hundred pounds to see the old girl’s first look of amazement, when she discovers that the house is empty. It would be worth any sum of money—thousands—millions,” and Mr. Conway Jones looked as delighted as though he were quite ready to produce thousands, and millions, in exchange for the pleasure of watching the poor cook’s disappointment at the loss of her quarter’s wages. He possessed the happy facility, in common with many gentlemen of his class, of talking with the utmost fluency about things of which he had not the slightest knowledge. .

But Mrs. Conway Jones was unresponsive. Her husband had not chosen to accept her previous hint, and now she cautioned him more openly.

“How can you talk so foolishly?” she



said sharply, as she knitted her brows, and trod upon his toe. "You will make the girl imagine that we are running away from Rutland Gate never to return. Of course Hodson will be surprised for the moment, but she knows well enough that secret business often compels you to leave home without warning: and she will look after the house for us, as she has done before, until we return to it. As soon as you allow me, I shall write and give her our address abroad, and if you are detained longer than you expect, I must return without you. My children are here, it is not likely I shall remain long away from *them*," with a sentimental air.

"I should think not," returned Mr. Conway Jones, recalled to a sense of his duty. "By Jove! the little darlings! I should like to have seen them before I started; but what can a man do, when the—"

"When the Royal command sends him in a contrary direction," quickly interposed his wife, "of course not! Men in your

position have only to obey. And now, Conway, here is the station; do make haste and look after my boxes which are in the booking office. There are nine of them, and here is the ticket."

She produced a printed paper as she spoke, and Véronique could not help admiring the forethought of her mistress, as she watched the nine large cases, containing her wearing apparel and personal property, which, in anticipation of a sudden move on the part of her husband, she had sent in advance of them, brought out from the booking office of the station, and placed in the luggage van. She did not travel to Dover in the same carriage as Mr. and Mrs. Conway Jones, and when she joined them on the platform at the other end, another surprise awaited her, for the nine cases were multiplied by two, as many more having been sent on to the Dover station to await the arrival of their owners there.

"It was fortunate I thought of dispatching the Venetian glass, and *Sèvres* china,

when I did," Véronique heard the lady whisper to her husband, as a large package marked 'Glass, with care,' was carried past them on the platform, "if it had been delayed a day later, we should probably have lost it."

"Yes! by Jove," exclaimed the gentleman, "those scoundrels would have thought nothing of bagging it again. Infernal robbers! But you're a brick, Cissy my darling! a perfect brick! no other woman would have thought of such a thing; I'm sure they wouldn't, by Jove! But where's your girl? tell her to follow us at once. The packages are all right, and I don't want to be seen standing about this platform. Some fool might recognise me!"

Mr. and Mrs. Conway Jones had arrived too late to catch the mid-day boat for Calais, and therefore, annoying as it must have been to the gentleman, employed under Government, to delay transacting the business of the realm for another twelve hours, he was compelled to submit to his destiny, and spend the interval at an hotel,



to which Véronique followed them mechanically, wondering much, meantime, why, since her mistress was sure of returning to Rutland Gate, she should have thought it worth while to pack up so much china, and glass, and pictures to take abroad with her; and who were the robbers, whom they feared would have carried them off in their absence.

But she had not solved this question to her own satisfaction, before she was startled by hearing another quite as enigmatical to her simple understanding.

“By Jove!” exclaimed Mr. Conway Jones, as with his disengaged hand he slapped his thigh, “what should I have done, Cissy my darling, if I had not thought of giving old Cleveland a bill of sale upon the furniture? I do think it’s the neatest thing I ever thought of, for Addison can’t come down upon us for the money under a couple of months at least, and I shall have dodged him half over the Continent by that time.”

“Addison’s claim will hold good, it is



the prior one," remarked Mrs. Conway Jones quietly.

"So much the worse for old Cleveland!" was the emphatic reply.

But Véronique understood nothing about "bills of sale," or "prior claims." The more she overheard of her employers' conversation, the more puzzled she became; and she could not yet make up her mind, whether she liked Mr. and Mrs. Conway Jones, or not.

## CHAPTER IV.

### AT BRÜSSENBURGH.

SAFELY housed in the Dover Hotel, neither Mr. nor Mrs. Conway Jones ventured to show themselves abroad again that day, but ordered an excellent dinner to be served them, with lots of champagne, over which they made very merry, and having given Véronique her full share of the good things, they took her on board the evening boat and crossed the same night for Calais. The unpleasant journey, though so short, completely upset Mrs. Conway Jones, and on arriving in Calais, she insisted upon being allowed to go to bed, instead of at once proceeding by the train. So that it was not until the after-

noon of the next day that they arrived in Brüssensburgh. The varied feelings with which the breast of Véronique was filled as she sat in a second-class carriage, replete with smoking Belgians, and tried to realise that the train was rushing forward with her towards the place which held her husband, she could not have described even to herself. It seemed to her as though she had breathed more freely ever since she placed her foot on foreign soil; as if the fact of hearing the language which was most familiar to her spoken on all sides was a sign she had come home, as though the heavy burthen of suspense under which she had now laboured for so many weary months, was being lifted from her shoulders and would soon be cast away entirely. Each hour she became more talkative and gay—more like the lively, happy girl that she had been in the old days, before Père Joseph died — eye-laughter once more sparkled in her glance, and uncalled-for smiles appeared upon her mouth. The Véronique whom Gordon Romilly had left

behind him on the Neilgherry Hills had been a broken-spirited, weeping creature, and the Véronique who had accompanied Mrs. Colonel Dowdson home in search of him, had been silent, subdued, and always restless and uneasy. But from the hour when she traced her husband's dwelling-place, her demeanour altogether changed. It was but, after all, a few days since she had heard the news of his being at Brüssenburgh from the lips of Mrs. Dowdson's friend; and here she was upon her very way to him, and as Véronique reflected on the fact, she scarcely thought she could be the same woman she had been a week before. Each station which they stopped at she was sure was Brüssenburgh, and when, after about three hours' travelling, they really arrived at the place, and she was lifted out trembling with excitement upon the railway platform, had she obeyed the impulse of her heart she would have run away then and there, and made the streets resound to the name of her beloved. But Véronique lived in the nineteenth



century, and therefore, although she was in reality so agitated as to be of little service, she was compelled to remain quietly by her mistress's side, whilst her master collected the baggage, and then to take her seat in one of the *vigilantes* upon which it was piled, and consent to be driven just where he thought fit to direct her.

It was not, perhaps, the best time of the year at which to visit Brüssenburgh, for although the season, usually a very gay one, was not yet at a conclusion, the trees were still leafless, and consequently the greatest charm of the city, and that which made it pleasanter (like most foreign places), than towns of the same standing in England, was absent. The Boulevards, although crowded with pedestrians, were sheltered by bare branches only; the park was a network of the same, not an ever-green appearing in it from end to end, and the plaster statues which gave it so brave a look in the summer weather, had been turned into miniature straw-stacks, in order to preserve the fragile material of which

they were formed, from the inclemency of a Belgian winter.

Yet Véronique cared for none of these disadvantages, it is questionable whether she even observed them. From the moment that the laden vehicle of which she was sent in charge, left the railway station, she sat well forward and kept turning her head incessantly from side to side, in hopes of catching a glimpse of the figure which she felt that, however altered by care or sickness, she should recognise again immediately. The curious little market-carts of milk or vegetables, drawn by dogs in leather and brass harness, and followed by stout Belgian girls in snow-white caps, short petticoats and wooden *sabots*, drew no more than a passing notice from her. She looked at them, it is true, as she did at the Flemish women with their huge gold ornaments and straw bonnets like moderately-sized clothes-baskets, and at the little babies tucked away in their perambulators beneath knitted coverlets lined with pink or blue ; but the next mo-

ment her eye had caught another group of idle gentlemen, and was peering hungrily into each face, as it successively passed before her.

When the *vigilante* reached that part of the Boulevards where the crowd was thickest, her excitement became painful, for it was impossible that she could scan each countenance of the multitude that thronged the pathway, and Véronique felt, oh ! how keenly ! that her Gor-don might be, even at that moment, crossing her, and she not know it. She watched costume after costume, of velvet, and silk, and cashmere ; she grew dazzled with the vision of children decked in every colour of the rainbow ; the horsemen on the other side passed her so rapidly that she could not catch a glimpse of their features ; but yet, when Véronique found that the *vigilante*, in obedience to the directions given to its *cocher*, turned sharply away from the gay scene she had been contemplating, and rattled up a by-street leading to the boarding house which Mr. and Mrs. Conway



Jones had decided to patronise, she very nearly cried from vexation and disappointment. But the next moment she had reproached herself for being so childish, and the vehicle which contained her master and mistress following close upon her own, she was soon fully occupied in helping the latter to make herself comfortable, and had no more time to devote to her own unreasonable fancies. The boarding-house at which Mr. Conway Jones had determined to stay was quiet and retired, which on more grounds than one, suited his present position. It was also somewhat removed from the *quartier* of the town most occupied by the English, and it was seldom frequented itself except by Belgians, and those not of the first-class. But the caution and secrecy necessary to the movements of diplomatic servants, rendered all these circumstances desirable rather than otherwise, and Véronique was too unaccustomed to the ways and manners of English gentle-people to discover that her master and mistress had done anything unusual in



selecting their present place of abode. Unlike her last employers, they both spoke French fluently; they were too familiar with the continent (having paid it several visits in the same hurried and peculiar manner before) to have done otherwise; consequently there seemed nothing strange to her in the fact of their selecting a boarding-house where the English language was not understood, and for her own part, when she was shown into the room allotted to her, she thought she felt more at home than she had ever done in her life before.

She liked the bright shining *parquet* which was flooded with water every morning, and then "swabbed" like the decks on board ship; the high muslin blinds, which excluded all observation from the outside world, were white as the peasant women's caps, and the quaint little stove which stood in the centre of the room, with a huge funnel so disproportionate to itself, thrust through a hole in the wall, seemed as familiar to her as though she had known

it always. She did not even care, that in order to get to her apartment, she was obliged to cross a vast and airy *porte cochère* and climb up three painful flights of uncarpeted stairs, so charmed was she to recognize in all around her, the descriptions which Père Joseph had so often given her of his native country and his visit to Brüsenburgh. The thought of him, of all his goodness and tenderness to her, and of his often expressed wish that she should first see Brüsenburgh in company with himself brought a few natural tears into Véronique's eyes, but they were soon dispersed, for her rapid fancy flew again to Gordon Romilly, and the idea conceived before, that it was impossible he could stay in that city and be forgetful of her, gained the ascendancy of her melancholy recollections, and wreathed her mouth in hopeful smiles. Yet Mrs. Conway Jones was not so pleasant with her maid that evening as was her wont, for several little things had combined to put her out. In the first place, Mr. Conway Jones, on whom the dinner-

hour had been emphatically impressed, had gone out for a stroll and forgotten all about it, and kept her waiting until, as she declared, she was quite faint from hunger. And when he did return, he omitted to bring with him a certain cordial medicine which she desired to take, and which, knowing the town well, she had commissioned him to procure at an English chemist's in the principal "*rue.*" When Mrs. Conway Jones was sweet tempered, it was not principle but policy on which she acted; and being at the present moment too upset and wearied by her journey to have any leisure to bestow on policy, she permitted herself to become thoroughly peevish and put out.

"Moore!" she exclaimed in a whining voice, as Véronique obeyed the summons which was sent her immediately after dinner, "you must go and get me some of this medicine. The shop is not far from here, and if you will take the trouble I am quite sure that you can find it."

"Certainly, Madame!" replied Véronique,



with ready compliance, "I will go at once," and receiving as explicit directions as it was possible for her mistress to afford her, she took the vial in her hand, and set off in search of the chemist's shop.

It was then eight o'clock in the evening, by no means a fit hour for an unprotected girl to be traversing the lighted streets and dark *faubourgs* of such a town as Brüssenburgh, and a few months back, Véronique's natural timidity would have made her shrink from undertaking such a task in a strange place. But consideration for the safety or morals of her domestics was not at all the sort of consideration which the lady whom Véronique served ever exhibited: she rarely scolded or found fault with them, but they might get into trouble as they chose, for she considered it no part of her business to guard them from it. And the girl was not only willing but eager to go. She had been sitting at her bedroom window all the afternoon, gazing into the narrow, silent street, and longing to obtain permission to leave it and wander



into the more frequented parts of Brüssenburgh. No life had seemed to penetrate their *quartier* whilst she watched thus, unless a barrow full of sand with an unfortunate little cur straining at the wheel in front, and a man lazily doing his part of the labour behind, whilst he made the street resound with a melancholy cry of "*sable!*" or a group of mendicants, or a few scattered pedestrians, could be termed life. She felt instinctively that this would be no thoroughfare for such as Gordon Romilly to frequent, and she panted to traverse the town itself, and go to the places that English gentlemen walked in. She felt like a prisoner as long as she was in the house, as if its doors and windows were bolts and bars to keep her from her husband's arms : and when she heard the large portals, which were more like the entrance to a stable than a private dwelling, slam behind her, and found herself in the open air, she went eagerly on her errand, almost as excited as though she had been going by appointment to meet him. Con-

versant as she was with the language of the country, she experienced little difficulty in finding her way, for as soon as the instructions with which Mrs. Conway Jones had furnished her, were exhausted, she had but to step into one of the brilliantly lighted shops, and ask to be further directed.

The "*Rue de la Haute Cour*," in which was situated the English chemist's shop, was the principal street of Brüssenburgh, and the many striking novelties with which the windows of its "*magasins*" were crowded, would have been sufficient to attract the notice of anyone with a mind less painfully absorbed than was that of Véronique, but she had no eye for the masses of jewellery, pictures, and fashionable millinery so temptingly displayed before her. She did not even observe the attraction provoked by her own appearance, or if by chance her eager gaze called forth an expression of admiration from some passer-by, the blush occasioned by it would fade but too soon beneath the sigh of bitter disappointment by which it would be followed.

She found the chemist's, received and paid for the medicine, and had nothing left to do but to carry it home for the comfort and relief of Mrs. Conway Jones. As she reached the top of the "*Rue de la Haute Cour*" again, and looking back upon its brilliant shops and crowded pavements, so full of life and light, contemplated the dark and lonely Boulevards which she must traverse before she reached the boarding-house, Véronique felt sorely tempted to walk down its length once more. It seemed so probable to her that Gordon was pacing backwards and forwards amongst that gay company : it appeared so likely a position in which to find her glorious lover, to suit so well the glittering halo with which in her eyes he was still surrounded. But she knew that the hour was late and that her duty called her home ; and so, with a sigh, Véronique deliberately turned her back on what, to her vivid, half foreign imagination, seemed like paradise, and bent her steps towards her destination.

The Boulevards certainly appeared most



gloomy, and very unlike what they had done on that same afternoon, as she had driven past them into Brüssenburgh. The trunks of the tall bare trees, many of which were very old, looked like grim sentinels ready to challenge her as she passed, and the only lights her path could boast of, were those which gleamed from the little rectangular *aubettes* which were stationed at the corner of each crossing, and whose sides were formed of different coloured glass.

Véronique lost the confidence she had experienced when in the lighted thoroughfares : disappointment had quenched the buoyant hope with which she had started on her expedition, and with it disappeared her courage. The gloom and loneliness of her present route oppressed her spirits, and instead of examining the faces of those whom she encountered, she began to steal to one side as soon as she heard voices or footsteps approaching her through the night, and stand quietly behind one of the thick trunks of the trees until the owners of



them had passed upon their way. She had performed this feat several times without observation, and had nearly reached that point at which she must quit the Boulevards, when she perceived a group of several men with lighted cigars in their mouths coming towards her, and an instinct for which she could not afterwards account, made her fly from their presence, obscurely as she traced it, and trembling with agitation, take shelter, as before, behind a tree. But this time the suddenness of her movement betrayed her, and she had scarcely arrested her footsteps, when to her horror she heard one of the gentlemen exclaim—

“*Cours donc mon petit chat, mais je te suis,*” and the next moment a burly figure, thickly enveloped in a fur-trimmed overcoat, had dodged her round the trunk of the tree, and laid his hand, though not ungently, upon her shoulder.

“*Pourquoi veux-tu m'échapper?*” he enquired, with a loud laugh, “*je ne suis pas un ours, moi.*”

“ *Oh ! Monsieur ! Laissez-moi m’en aller, je vous supplie,*” said Véronique, in an agitated whisper, which conveyed the notion of greater alarm than any exclamation could have done.

“ *Ma foi ! non !*” returned her captor, “ *pas avant que je n’aie appris ton nom, car tu est fort jolie, je le devine sans le voir.*”

“ *Monsieur, je vous en conjure ne me retenez plus,*” continued the girl in an agony of entreaty which almost amounted to a cry, and then another voice was heard to interfere :

“ *Sacristi ! Alphonse ! laisse cette petite—voilà un gendarme qui arrive,*” at which piece of information Monsieur Alphonse laughed lightly, gave her shoulder a playful shake, and ran to rejoin his companions.

She was about to proceed then, thankful the adventure had been no worse, when the sound of a voice arrested her—not the voice of Monsieur Alphonse, nor of the man who had addressed him, but a third, an English voice, thicker and more inarticulate

than when she had heard it last, but still not to be mistaken by her faithful memory.

“Don’t play the fool, Thibault,” it said, in a tone of sulky remonstrance, “we are late as it is, already,” and then the three men linked arms again, and sauntered away in the direction from which she had come.

Véronique stood behind the tree as if she had been paralysed. She could not have called him if her life had depended upon it, she could not have uttered the name of Gordon Romilly if a drawn sword had been held above her head the while ; she tried to do so, more than once, but the syllables stuck in her throat, and no sound was apparent but a dry gasping sob of pain. And yet it was he—she was as sure that those few ordinary words had been spoken by her husband, as though she had met him, face to face, in the broad light of day—and she had permitted him to pass on without saying a word to intimate her presence.

On the first conviction of the mistake she had made, of the good fortune she had



missed, Véronique was powerless to move with chagrin and disappointment, the next moment she had rushed from her hiding-place, and peered eagerly into the darkness, to catch a glimpse of the retreating forms of the three men ; but they were already too far distant to be distinguished, and overcome by the conflicting feelings which had been raised by the *rencontre*, Véronique sat down on one of the benches of the Boulevards, and burst into tears. But it was not long before she conquered this emotion, which had been provoked more from sudden excitement and surprise than from any new anguish, and by the time that she had dried her eyes, and proceeded on her way, there was no room in her breast for any feeling but intense happiness. Had she not been in his presence, and heard his voice, what further confirmation could she need that all her troubles were drawing to a close ?

As she considered this, she felt so humbly grateful for the blessing which had been accorded her, and her soul was so filled



with a sense of the goodness of Him from whom it came, that she longed to kneel down upon the Boulevards and return thanks then and there for the restoration of her lover. No bitterer feelings mixed with the pæon of praise which was sounding in her heart at that moment, no thought of his unexplained desertion, of his silence, of his apparent forgetfulness, troubled her joyous spirit ; he was *there*, living, breathing, warm, before her, and that knowledge was sufficient for her present happiness.

As she walked homewards, lightly and airily, sometimes almost running as she went, she vexed her trusting faith with no questions of the future, nor even thought of it, except perhaps of that first blissful moment when she should look into his eyes, and make her presence in Brüssenburgh a fact to him ; but she dwelt lovingly upon the past, and conjured up each byegone word and glance and caress that he had given her, so vividly, that at last it seemed impossible that she could have been sepa-

rated from him for nearly twelve long weary months. And when she went to bed that night, she slipped her wedding ring off the ribbon by which she usually attached it to her neck, and put it on her finger with a proud and happy smile, and fell to sleep with it still there, to dream that Gor-don found her out, and came himself, eager and exultant, to carry her from the boarding-house and the service of Mrs. Conway Jones, and to take her home to live with him for ever.

## CHAPTER V.

### BEHIND A MASK.

WITH the rise of next morning's sun (and the sun rose very early and very bright in Brüsssburgh) Mrs. Conway Jones's fit of ill-humour had evaporated, for she had received a cordial far better suited to her need than that which Véronique had brought her from the chemist's shop.

They had arrived in Belgium at the commencement of the carnival, that three days' holiday of which foreigners know so well how to make use, and which immediately precedes the long course of lentils and bitter herbs, unbroken save by the *mi-carême*, and such small indulgences as the priests may be bribed or wheedled into

bestowing on their fasting flocks ; and Mr. Conway Jones, who had been swaggering in his usual manner about Brüssenburgh, and renewing some of his old acquaintances, had received an invitation from one of the rich Belgians living in the town to take his wife to his house on that day, that she might view the array of masques and masqueraders from his balcony.

Judging his importance by the magnitude of his ideas, the innocent Belgians took Mr. Conway Jones for a great English "milord," and believed implicitly all that he chose to tell them respecting his houses and estates and property at home. And it was not only foreigners with whose credulity he thus played whilst prosecuting his tours upon the Continent. Englishmen were sometimes so simple as to believe that Mr. Conway Jones was a gentleman of honour, and Mrs. Conway Jones all that a lady should be ; and, permitting an intimacy in consequence, found themselves after a while in a lamentable dilemma, from which there was no means of escape, except



by pursuing a course more candid than polite. But the Conway Joneses were used to rebuffs on the part of society, and were as practised in gracefully backing out of it before the face of an awkward question, as in pushing their way onwards whilst they had the opportunity of doing so. They had never visited Brüssenburgh except under favourable circumstances; that is, when friends had been weak enough to lend them money, or they had been sharp enough to raise it. As yet, therefore, the sun shone for them in that place, and they took care to make hay whilst it did so.

The invitation which she had received, although from strangers, was one after Mrs. Conway Jones's own heart, for she hoped she would be made much of, as the only English lady amongst a score perhaps of the Brüssenburgh *bourgeoisie*, and since once known she found it impossible even to be allowed to serve in the social heaven, she was not above reigning in the other place.

She spent the whole morning arranging

what robe, and mantle, and bonnet she should wear, and kept her lady's-maid employed with needle and thread until it was time that she should dress her. Véronique was thankful when that time arrived; her heart and head were full of the one topic which engrossed them, and it fretted her to be obliged to sit still and listen to small details of millinery, and to have her advice asked on the disposition of a flower, or the settling of a fold. She longed to get away, all by herself, that she might think over the great happiness which was in store for her. She wanted to tell it out, though it were only to bare walls; and she intended, as soon as her mistress should have taken her departure, to employ her leisure time in transcribing a letter to David, by which he should see that she was happy, although he could never guess the cause which made her so. But when her task was completed, and the *vigilante* which was to convey Mrs. Conway Jones to the town stood at the door, her mistress desired her to put on her walking things and go with her.

“ Me ! Madame,” she exclaimed in astonishment.

“ Yes, Moore,” was the reply. “ I thought you understood so all along. Mr. Conway Jones is to meet me at Monsieur Trappeniers’ house, and if you were familiar with the ways of the Continent, you would know that a lady never goes about here alone, especially on such a day as this.”

Mrs. Conway Jones, like many another woman whose footing is insecure, professed to be exceedingly particular about trifling matters of etiquette, imagining that the public would infer from one point how particular she was on all ; and perhaps she was not unwise in her generation. Her command at first greatly discomposed Véronique, who shrunk from going amongst a lot of strangers, and in the equivocal position of an uninvited servant ; but the mistress did not show any inclination to retake her order, and the maid had nothing to do but to obey.

The house of Monsieur Trappeniers (of the firm of Trappeniers et Fils, *fabricants*



*de dentelles*) stood in the very centre of the Rue de la Haute Cour, commanding a full view of all that went on in the town of Brüssensburgh; and when they reached it, they found the 'salon' and its balcony already filled with men and women, eagerly watching what was passing in the street below, and making merry with one another over the luncheon provided by the liberality of their host.

Mr. Conway Jones was there before them, and had evidently already worked himself into the good graces of the company, with whom he appeared as intimate as though he had known them for years; and when Mrs. Conway Jones, dressed in the most fashionable and becoming costume, and with her face got up *à merveille*, sailed into the room, and lispingly apologised to Madame Trappeniers for having taken the liberty of bringing her maid with her, as she was not accustomed to go anywhere alone; her Parisian bonnet, no less than her faultless accent, seemed to create a favourable impression on all present, and



Monsieur and Madame, overwhelming her with thanks for having honoured them by accepting their invitation, led her to the best seat in the balcony, and pressed her to partake of everything on the luncheon table.

Mrs. Conway Jones received all these civilities with the condescension becoming so great a lady. She smiled blandly upon Madame Trappeniers, and half closed her eyes in answering Monsieur, until Véronique, who had taken up a station behind her mistress's chair, thought that the compliments passing between the new acquaintances would never come to a conclusion. The gay scene, however, which was taking place before them soon distracted their attention from each other, for the Carnival had reached its height, and the streets were becoming more crowded every minute. Men with hideous masks, disguised as monkeys, dogs, or devils, called out to them incessantly, from beneath the window; bouquets of flowers, which Monsieur Trappeniers, with inimitable grace would raise and present to them every now and then,

fell at the ladies' feet ; and occasionally a shower of *bonbons* from some passing carriage would be scattered far and wide, finding covert in their bonnets or mantles or skirts, whilst those which fell short of the verandah excited a lively scramble amongst the little *gamins* in the street below.

Véronique had followed her mistress that afternoon, vexed there should be a necessity for doing so, and indisposed to feel interested in anything she might see ; but she had not been standing behind her chair long before she began to be as amused as the rest at the ludicrous novelties which she beheld. It was impossible to look without laughing at a monstrous tiger, formed of two men, both stooping, back to back, one of whom worked the string which caused the animal's tail to move, and the other that which performed the same office for his jaws. Nor to calmly behold the same men, when tired out by the exertion, and nearly stifled from the close imprisonment, quietly slink out of their tiger case, and, taking up the royal beast in their

arms, walk off with it until they should be sufficiently rested to recommence operations.

A group, intended to represent "*Les Anglais*," according to the Belgian interpretation of the word, excited universal merriment; the lady being dressed in a cloak down to her heels, of a pattern not seen since the flood, with a large straw bonnet, long yellow curls, and prominent teeth; and the man, with a tightly buttoned coat, huge stock, and eye-glass in his eye, whilst they each held a child by the hand, attired after a similar fashion, with an enormous white collar and flapping broad-brimmed hat.

Yet many of the costumes were as picturesque and pretty as others were absurd, and the whole scene was a motley assemblage of Mirth and Folly. A great number of vehicles mingled with the crowd, carts gaily decked with flags and flowers bore groups upon them representing different scenes, allegorical, artistical, or natural; and a long string of carriages, some filled with maskers, and others with gentlemen in



plain clothes, scattering *bonbons* and *bouquets* to the passers-by, blocked up the street, and necessarily made the procession pass very slowly ; whilst every chink and cranny in the thick assembly seemed filled up with dirty children and ragged beggars, who pressed upon the rest, doubtless eager to seize the first opportunity of picking their pockets for them.

Meanwhile Véronique looked on at it all, at first with surprise, then with interest, lastly with the keenest delight, for she had been merry enough when things went right with her, poor child, and had a perfect appreciation of anything which tended to provoke mirth. So that she was in the very midst of as much merriment as she considered it respectful for one in her situation to give vent to, and was leaning as far as she could over her mistress's chair, and gazing eagerly on every side of her, when there occurred a block amongst the carriages, and after a little delay the occupants of almost every vehicle rose up and peered around to discover the reason. In



the midst of which temporary confusion, a masker, one of three gentlemen who had passed their balcony in an open carriage but a moment before, and thrown a splendid bouquet, accompanied by an airy kiss, at the very feet of Mrs. Conway Jones, removed his mask for an instant, to pass a handkerchief over his heated brow. The action was almost instantaneous, but Véronique happened to have her eyes upon his figure at the time, and with the rapidity of lightning she recognised the features of Gordon Romilly, and forgetful of everything else in the excitement of the discovery, loudly called upon his name.

“Gor-don ! Gor-don !” she exclaimed vehemently, “Gor-don ! *je suis ici,*” and without waiting to give an explanation of her words or her conduct, she left the chair of Mrs. Conway Jones, and ran swiftly from the apartment.

To gain the hall-door was the work of a moment, but to find her way through the dirty crowd which blocked it up to the very entrance, was not so easy. Panting,

breathless, Véronique attempted to force a passage for herself, but was deterred from every quarter—a man pushed her rudely on the right, a flower-girl thrust a bunch of violets in her face from the left, *gamins* obstructed the way in front, and the vehicles had again been set in motion, and the procession was all moving on together. She called on Gordon Romilly once or twice, as, with clasped hands, she entreated the crowd to make way for her, but rude laughter and jeering was the only reply which she received, and she had had no time to make a further effort before she heard the voice of Mr. Conway Jones by her side.

“Moore! what is the matter?” he demanded; “why have you left your mistress? you must come back immediately; this is no place for you.”

“Oh, Monsieur, let me follow him, let me speak to him,” she said imploringly, “he does not know that I am here—indeed he does not; oh! my heart will break.”

They were speaking in English, on purpose not to be understood by the strangers

by whom they were surrounded, but there is a language which is known all over the world, and the face of Véronique expressed it now, and the rough crew who witnessed her distress, responded by another laugh, and several sentiments not expressive of their sympathy.

“ I don't know what on earth you're talking about,” replied her master, “ but you must come into the house again, now, Moore ; by Jove, you must, or you will have this rabble insulting you. Come with me, at once.”

He spoke authoritatively, taking her by the arm as he did so, and she submitted to his command, and suffered herself to be led back in silence to the room which she had quitted. But, as she climbed the staircase, it appeared to her distorted fancy as if God must be against her, since he permitted trivial circumstances so to interfere to keep her from her Gor-don ; and as she entered the apartment, she felt as though her heart were dying within her at this second disappointment, and as Mrs. Conway Jones was



just about to sharply reprimand her for her extraordinary behaviour, and ask the reason of it, her maid, from the reaction consequent upon sudden and excessive emotion, sank down on the carpet at her feet in a swoon. Then the women dropped surprise, and questioning, and conjecture, and thought of nothing but restoring her to ease and consciousness.

“*Pauvre petite, sans doute elle a vu son amoureux,*” said a motherly looking body, who was employing herself in chafing the girl’s hands.

“*Mais, Madame, c’est impossible,*” interposed Mrs. Conway Jones, “*elle ne connaît personne ici.*”

“*Il n’y a rien d’impossible pour les femmes,*” exclaimed a lively young Belgian woman, “*il y a amour sous roche, j’en suis sûre. Ne l’avez vous pas entendu crier, Madame ?*”

Still Mrs. Conway Jones maintained that it was an impossibility that Véronique could be acquainted with any one in Brüs-senburgh, and so the chafing and the pat-



ting, and the application of cold water and smelling salts went on without further discussion, though each lady preserved her own opinion on the subject.

“ Well, Moore ! do you feel better now ? ” enquired Mrs. Conway Jones, as after a lapse of seven or ten minutes, the girl opened her eyes again, stared wildly at the women who surrounded her, and then attempted to stagger to her feet.

“ Have I been ill, Madame ? ” she asked, suspiciously, and then putting her hand to her forehead, as recollection returned to her, she added, despondently, “ *oh ! mon Dieu !* ”

“ Yes ! but you are all right again, now, ” replied her mistress, who was very curious to learn what it was that had affected her. “ You saw something in the street which startled you, I suppose ; or did you recognise a friend ? I thought you knew no one in Brüssenburgh, Moore—that your people lived further south. These ladies must have thought you crazy to run off from my side in the way you did. ”

“I beg your pardon, *Mesdames*,” said Véronique, as she looked up timidly in the faces bent over her, “but I was not quite myself,” and then blushing violently, as she remembered on whose name she had called in her agitation, she added, “I saw a person who reminded me of an old friend—that is all; but I am very very sorry that I should have caused you such trouble.”

“Would you like to go home?” said her mistress, who was seldom indifferent to her servants’ illnesses.

“Indeed I should, Madame, if you could spare me,” replied Véronique; and so they got a *vigilante*, and sent her back to the boarding-house, where she was not joined by Mr. and Mrs. Conway Jones until late in the evening.

The interval was not passed unhappily by her. Once recovered from the shock and agitation by which her swoon had been occasioned, Véronique could not but accept the reason of it as an additional cause for thankfulness, and the glimpse, brief as it had been, which she had obtained of Gor-

don Romilly's face, was a fresh stimulus to her to persevere until he had seen her own, and from that moment she never again rested, day or night, until she had met him.

All her mistress's half-playful, half-serious enquiries on the subject could but draw from her the confession that she had seen some one in the crowd who reminded her of an old friend, and Mrs. Conway Jones whilst telling her she was too young as yet to think of lovers, was left to decide for herself whether there was such an article in the case or not. But Véronique found full opportunity of prosecuting the search on which she was bent, for her master and mistress were soon so taken up with their new acquaintances, that they were generally absent half the day, during which time she might rove all over Brüssensburgh if she felt so inclined.

Perhaps it may seem strange that a woman so anxious to meet her lover should not have made more direct enquiries respecting his place of residence, and so at once have solved the mystery which was



torturing her, but the spell which Gordon Romilly had cast over Véronique during the brief period of their married life, was not yet all dissolved, and in heart she was still as much his slave as she had ever been.

She had ventured so far as to mention his name to the servants at the boarding-house, and at one or two shops in the town, but the servants were freshly in from the provinces, and knew nothing of Brüs-senburgh, and the English part of the population there being an ever-shifting panorama, the shopkeepers were not much better informed.

And Véronique had ever before her mind's eye, the last injunctions of her husband and Père Joseph. Her uncle had been her ideal of all that was best, and holiest, and wisest in man, and if he had thought right to impress so deeply on her the necessity of keeping her marriage a secret, there must be some very stringent reason for her doing so. And Gordon Romilly was her ideal of all that was



dearest and most loveable ; she felt that his conduct was unaccountable, but her affection made her believe it could be satisfactorily explained : and her ambition was to be able to present herself before him, and say that she had kept their secret inviolate. So she plodded on towards what she believed to be the culmination of her hopes, steadfastly though wearily, for after the day that she had caught sight of him at the Carnival, Gordon Romilly accompanied some of his friends to Paris for a week, and the girl who loved him so faithfully, paced up and down the town and the Boulevards, directing her wistful glance towards every passenger in vain. This last week of waiting terribly tried Véronique, perhaps more than all the rest of the suspense put together had done ; for she expected to meet him at every turn, each figure that approached her she hoped would prove himself, and constant expectation, and constant disappointment, made the hours pass like days, and the days like weeks. Sometimes she would ask herself

with sudden alarm, if it were possible she could have been mistaken, whether the voice she heard upon the Boulevards, and the features which the removal of the mark so momentarily revealed, could have been delusions, phantasms, raised by her own fevered imagination : and that, because she was always thinking and dreaming about him, tones and faces assumed the colour of her mind. Or, supposing she were altogether on a wrong track, that Mrs. Dowdson's friend had been deceived, that Gordon Romilly was not in Brüssenburgh at all, or having been there, that he had gone away again, perhaps to some far distant place where it was hopeless that, in her present position, she should have any chance of tracking him. As this suspicion struck her, Véronique would turn sick and faint beneath its influence, and think her hope was dying : but the next minute it would rise up again, lively and strong as ever, to rebuke her want of courage, whilst she would call herself to task for being so foolish as to imagine that she *could* mistake

the voice or features engraven on her heart. Yet it was weary work to pace up and down, day after day, before those rows of tall, white houses, each one with its embroidered lace curtains and blinds, and its white hall door, looking exactly like the last: and to wonder in which lived Gordon, and whether he ever, ever thought of her now. And one day towards the close of the week when this idea was pressing very heavily upon the over-burthened little heart, Véronique took advantage of a long spare afternoon to go down to Ste. Geneviève, the cathedral church of Brüssenburg, and join in the service there; she had visited it before, for one of her first desires had been to pray in the church of which Père Joseph had so often spoken to her, and she felt on this occasion as though the lofty grandeur of its vaulted roof, and the holy solemnity which pervaded its vast aisles, formed a fit refuge for one who wanted to hide from mortal eyes a grief too great to communicate to any but the Eternal.

It was a long walk from the boarding-



house to Ste. Geneviève, but Véronique did not feel the distance, she was conscious of nothing but her own sorrow. She entered the building, silently and awestruck, and without stopping to examine its many beauties, to admire the noble carvings with which it was adorned, or the chaste colouring of the painted glass windows surrounding it, quickly found her way to a side chapel, and taking possession of one of the *prie-dieux* there, buried her face in her hands. The organ was rolling forth a solemn anthem as she did so, and the chanters' voices rose in sweet unison with its chords, whilst the quiet tones of the priests as they performed mass, were yet sufficiently well heard by those who knelt near them. Véronique listened, and her tears, which had not been far off when she entered the cathedral, dropped faster and faster on her clasped hands. She had lost him; a conviction struck her in that moment that she had lost him for ever, and that if she desired any happiness in this world, she must seek it elsewhere than in



man. But yet it was hard to give him up ; hard to accept the truth that all her affection for him had been wasted, that she had stranded herself, for his sake, on a lonely shore, cut herself off, root and branch, from those who loved her, and deserted the only home that she had ever known—for this ! to kneel in Ste. Geneviève alone, and believe him lost to her for ever.

At the thought, Véronique bent her head still lower, and the hot burning tears rushed afresh from her eye-lids. Oh, Gor-don ! who had been her love, her saint, her god, she could not, would not think him false to her. She prayed as she had never prayed before, that God would pity her distress, that He would give her back her husband, or take her away from so much misery and evil ; that He would let her see her Gor-don if only once — once more before she died—that she might hear him say that he still loved and trusted in her.

She prayed so fervently, so abstractedly that lesser things were lost to her : she was kneeling alone before her Maker, and

she had no ears for the sounds of the outer world. The tones of the priest as he repeated mass, were unnoticed by Véronique, for a greater voice was whispering to her soul: the organ pealed on unheard, for another music was vibrating on her heart: what wonder then that the entrance of a party of English sight-seers bent on "doing" the Cathedral, should have had no power to disturb her devotions. Yet the chapel in which she knelt was one of the finest there, the altar piece was well worth inspection, and there were several beautifully carved tombs to be seen about it; and therefore, utterly regardless of the feelings of the worshippers (according to the custom of Englishmen upon the continent), the party, which was a numerous and very gay one, containing several fashionably attired ladies, entered without further demur, and proceeded in audible voices to criticise all they saw around them. They had accomplished the tour of the chapel and were about to quit it; one of the ladies having given it as her opinion, that after all, she

didn't "see much in it," when, disturbed by their chatter, Véronique rose suddenly from her knees to find that she was standing face to face with—Gordon Romilly.

Yes, there he was! looking much the same, she thought, as when he had left her—but apparently without an idea, even when his eyes first met her own, that she could be herself! To Véronique his appearance at that moment seemed like a divine answer to her prayer. She had just been entreating Heaven that she might see and speak to him, if but for an instant—and lo! he was before her—gazing with wide-open eyes, as though spellbound by her extraordinary likeness to the girl he had deserted, but making no effort to recognise or communicate with her.

"*Gor-don!*" she ejaculated beneath her breath, as though awe-struck by the revelation granted her, and fearing that to break the silence would be to see the beatific vision melt away; "*Gor-don, est-ce toi?*" and her eyes dilated with excitement and pleasure, whilst over her brow,



and cheek, and bosom, mantled the rosy blush of renewed hope and love! But with those few words her brief dream of happiness was indeed dissolved, and Gordon Romilly recalled to himself. She had spoken too low for her meaning to be distinguished by the strangers of the party, who might have taken her murmurings as an address to any of the images round them, but it was patent enough to him who had been staring at her for the last minute as though she had been a *revenant*; the spirit of that past which, try as he would, he had not been able to inter; and with the sound of her voice, of the tender foreign accent so well remembered, and proclaiming her to be flesh and blood, his manner instantly changed, and though Véronique read by the expression of his eyes and the pallor that overspread his countenance, that she was recognised, he turned abruptly away and almost pushed his party out of the chapel.

“You haven’t seen the altar screen,” he said loudly and hurriedly, “this way—



this way—no ! no ! the other—turn to the left—that’s it—and go straight ahead.”

“ Why, where are you taking us to ? ” Véronique heard one of the ladies exclaim, “ quite to the other end ? What is the good of all that, why can’t we see the place in order ? ”

She stood where he had left her, motionless, for the moment hardly able to realise that she had been so left, and then as the conviction forced itself upon her mind that it was so, and intentional ; that Gordon Romilly—her husband—had wished to avoid and pass her by—the bitter, bitter sense of being deserted and forgotten, returned in its full force, and with a bursting heart she sunk again upon her knees.

“ *Oh, mon Dieu !* ” she exclaimed in an agony which no words can describe, “ *qu’ai-je fait pour être condamnée ainsi à une torture incessante.* ”

She wrung her hands ; the sobs which she no longer cared to conceal shook her slight frame with unrestrained violence, and had the mass not been concluded and the

worshippers dispersed, her anguish must have been patent to everybody there.

“But where on earth can he have gone to?” exclaimed a voice almost in her ear. She started to her feet again, hastily striving to conceal the traces of her grief, and found that the same party, minus him with whom her thoughts were occupied, had returned to the chapel and were peering about it as though in search of somebody.

“Oh! never mind! What does it signify?” said a pretty young woman whose masses of bright brown hair showed well from beneath a pink bonnet, “he has returned home most likely—got a fit of the sulks because we would not consent to go exactly where he chose to lead us—we can find our way back just as well without him.”

“Is it the custom of Mr. Romilly to turn sulky every time he is thwarted?” demanded one of her friends with mock gravity, “because in that case, Lady Rose, one ought to think twice before one takes a husband.”

“ I don't know what *your* husband may choose to do,” replied Lady Rose, laughing as she looked at her watch, “ but I know that *mine* is very fond of his own way. Gordon may be led easily enough, but I defy anyone to drive him. Have we seen sufficient of this place ? because, if so, it is nearly time for us to return home.”

They all protested that it was the case, and amidst a great rustling of silks and clatter of tongues, the party moved down the aisle again, leaving Véronique transfixed by the conversation she had overheard. For a moment, though scarcely believing she could have understood aright, she was about to abandon herself to fresh lamentation, but with the next a desperate feeling came over her, a feeling that if she died from its reception, she must learn the truth, and without a second thought upon the subject, she dashed after them into the cathedral porch.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A TREE OF LIFE.

WHEN she arrived there she found the ladies all grouped together like a gay mass of flowers, whilst they discussed whether they should drive home or walk.

“A little walk will do you good, Lady Rose!” urged one of her companions, “besides which we may meet Mr. Romilly as we pass through the town.”

“Well! that’s a wonderful inducement, certainly,” said Lady Rose, “particularly in his present frame of mind. I think the fact of its being good for myself will have more weight with me. But it’s a terrible hill to climb.”

At this Véronique looked about her in a



wild manner for a *vigilante*, determined if they took one that she would engage a second and follow them.

“Oh, no! it really is nothing when you’re used to it,” said the first speaker, “and we will walk slowly. Come, Lady Rose, it is worth a little trouble only to see the shops in the Rue de la Haute Cour.”

Upon which Lady Rose yielded laughingly and a little reluctant, but her friends surrounded and bore her off; and sick at heart, and dizzy and half-blinded from the indulgence of her grief, Véronique dragged her weary limbs after them.

They proceeded leisurely up the principal street of the town, hanging about the shops and discussing the fashions and prices as they went, whilst behind them came the girl from whom life seemed to have been suddenly smitten, who tracked their forms without seeing them, listened to their remarks without hearing them, and was scarcely conscious herself of what she was doing, so weightily had the blow she had received, descended on her. She followed them as far as the Boulevards, and having watched

them disappear, still laughing and gay, behind the doors of a large house overlooking the park, turned to the first person she encountered, and in a low voice enquired how that part of Brüssembourg was called.

“*C'est le boulevard de Valenciennes, Mademoiselle,*” replied the polite Belgian, removing his hat with a profound bow.

*Numero 8, Boulevard de Valenciennes.*

Véronique regarded the situation and locality of the house for a few minutes, through eyeballs that were too scorched to weep, and a silence that was more emphatic than the loudest lamentation; and then turning slowly away, she bent her steps in the direction of the boarding-house, in the Rue d'Espagne, occupied by Mrs. Conway Jones.

“Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh it is a tree of life.”

She knew that text well, for her uncle had not kept the Bible from her; and often had she repeated it lately to revive her

drooping courage, and now as she crept homewards with trembling limbs, scarce able to support her body, she said it over again, trying to realise that it had been accomplished.

“A tree of life! a tree of life!” she murmured to herself, with dry fevered lips, and a wandering eye. “My desire has come—it must be a tree of life—God says so,” yet she did not look as though she had much life left in her, as she toiled upstairs to her own room in the Rue d’Espagne.

A letter was lying on the bedroom table, a letter in David’s writing, and enclosing another in an unknown hand. Véronique had written to her adopted brother during the last week, and this was his answer, containing an elaborate description of Rêve, and urgent entreaties that she would consent to join him there. Twelve hours before she would have read his many details of the beauty of the country, and the kindness and hospitality with which he had been received by the connections of



Père Joseph, with eager interest; now they elicited no other token from her but a heavy sigh, to think that she should care so little about anything on earth.

The letter which David enclosed was from her aunt, Marie Quetin, the elder sister of her mother, who belonged to the order of the *Sœurs de Charité*, and who sent her unknown niece as genial a welcome as her kind heart could dictate; and a general invitation to go and stay with her at the *Maison religieuse* to which she was attached.

At another moment these letters would have done Véronique good; they would have made her feel that she was not utterly dependent on one individual for earthly affection; that the world was not quite empty, if Gordon Romilly's doors were closed to her; that she had a refuge to fly to in case of need. But at the present, she was utterly incapable of thinking upon any subject but one. The frank and pious tenour of her aunt's words had no power to strengthen or refresh her; she shrunk



from the idea of encountering kindness however skilfully applied. She was like a creature writhing on a weapon, and longing for death to put an end to her pain, and she pushed the letters impatiently to one side, and returned to her own miserable suspicions.

Mrs. Conway Jones had an engagement for the opera, that evening, and having dressed her mistress, and seen her take her departure, Véronique again put on her walking things, and hastening to the Boulevard de Valenciennes, took up her station opposite *numero* 8, and with her eyes, hungrily fixed upon its portals, waited until they should once more open to give egress to Gordon Romilly. For she felt that she *must* speak to him, that she must hear the truth from his own lips, which she could never take on credence from another ; that it were better to die at his feet in hearing it, than to live on in such suspense as she was then enduring.

It was now eight o'clock in the evening, the night had fallen, and it was cold as

well as dark ; but Véronique was too excited to feel the lowness of the temperature, or to understand that she had watched an hour thus, before she saw the white doors of *numero* 8 thrown open, and a figure, which muffled as it was by winter clothing, she knew too well, step forth, and after looking first up and then down the Boulevards, begin to walk deliberately towards the town.

In a moment she was after him ; in a moment, like an arrow from a bow, she had sprung from the bench which she was occupying, and almost before the reverberation caused by the closing of the hall door had died away behind him, Gordon Romilly felt a hand upon his arm, and saw the tender pathetic face of Véronique, each line of which was engraven on his memory, gazing upwards in his own, with the same beseeching, earnest look, which it had worn of old. When he first beheld it, he made as though he would have thrust her to one side, and passed on his way, but as his eyes met her own, he staggered backwards,

and for several minutes, they regarded one another in silence.

We left Gordon Romilly at a very critical and unpleasant period of his existence. We left him just as he was about to commit a wrong action—an action for which his heart and conscience alike condemned him, and towards which he was urged only by the base fear of losing what he considered temporal advantages.

But when men who know what is right, stoop to parley with the devil, the issue of the argument may be anticipated, and Gordon Romilly with his vacillating temperament was not likely to prove an exception to the general rule. He had erred once, he had acted in the face of reason and justice before, and each error makes the second easier. But when he espoused Véronique Moore in the Roman Catholic chapel, on the Neilgherry Hills, although he knew that he was committing a dishonourable action, he had not felt himself to be so utterly worthless, as when he received the hand of Lady Rose Sellon, in



St. George's, Hanover Square. On the first occasion he had fully intended to do right by and by ; he had never meant to wrong the girl so grossly as subsequent circumstances induced him to do, but on the second, he had no such excuse, with which to flatter himself ; he knew that he was deliberately committing a great sin, and he had appeared a villain in his own eyes ever since.

Often had he sat down and tried to argue the point out with his conscience, and as often had he failed to make it good. It was useless to call his connection with Véronique a folly, and to attempt to laugh it off, as he had heard men do similar exploits ; he knew that with the girl their marriage had been a holy ceremony, he knew that with himself, so long as it lasted, it had been sacred as with her, and that Lady Rose, his wife, (in reality the only wife that he had ever had,) did not seem half so much his own as Véronique had done.

But though, the error committed beyond



recall, he had tried hard to put away from him the thought of the girl he had deserted ; though he had tried hard to banish the remembrance of all her innocent looks and ways and words and love for him, it is easy to believe that this task was a difficult one. Memory is an obstinate thing sometimes with which to wrestle in this life, and the features and the voices, which were they constantly before us we might learn to forget, become when distant never ceasing company, haunting us as we go.

Gordon Romilly wanted to forget Véronique ; it was essential for the tranquillity of his mind, for the comfort of his existence, that he should forget all about her as speedily as possible, and learn to interest himself in the lot he had chosen, and he was surprised to find the end he coveted so hard to obtain. He had tried to persuade himself that in marriage one woman would be much the same to him as another, that a wife was a convenient article that might be associated with, or left to her own devices, as the humour of her husband

dictated to him, and that if Lady Rose were not *the one, par excellence*, that, if free to choose, he would have selected from the world, she would, at all events, not have it in her power to render herself obnoxious to him; that she would do very well, in fact, *for a wife!* And he had already lived to learn, as others have before him, that such notions are chimeric.

It is impossible for a man to give his name to a woman, and with his name all the rights which accompany it, without at the same time investing her with the control of his life's happiness. If she does not love him, and discovers his indifference to her, she can take her revenge in a thousand various ways, unreachable by the code either of social or domestic law; and if she does love him, and he has any spark of manly feeling left, she will prove a constant reproach to him, an ever-present witness of the wrong he has done her. It is possible to be intensely miserable in this world without having actual sores to present for public commiseration, and marriage

is but a chance, even when entered on with every prospect of happiness and mutual love ; without them it is sure to prove a curse.

Lady Rose was not an unpleasant wife to live with ; on the contrary, she was lively, fashionable, and when nothing occurred to put her out, good tempered ; a trifle selfish and careless perhaps, too much like himself, in fact, to make of Gordon Romilly anything better than she had found him, but still a woman not impossible to dwell in peace with, so long as there was no other woman in the case ; and as yet her husband had had no reason to find fault with her, the only one he reproached was himself.

Their marriage had taken place with the full approbation of both families, and Gordon Romilly had enjoyed a very fair share of the comforts of this life since. He had found his cup filled to the brim with the coarse pottage for which he had bartered his birthright—the honour of an Englishman—but he had not thriven on it, al-



though to the world he carried the same gay careless front that he had ever done, and there were but few amongst his friends who suspected that his wife was not all that she should have been to him. Lady Rose herself was perfectly satisfied. Perhaps her ideas of the extent of human love were limited, perhaps she had never known what it is to be the subject of an engrossing passion, at all events she had no wish to see her husband any fonder, or to change the tenour of her matrimonial course. If Gordon Romilly suffered from remorse for having wedded her, as most assuredly he had done ever since her hand had been placed in his at the altar, he suffered by himself, and as far as Lady Rose was concerned, the sentiment was wasted, for she was not even cognisant of its necessity. She would reproach him sometimes with his silence or his sulkiness, and tell him that he was unbearable, but the next moment a lively air or a gay laugh would refute her charge, and prove how little she had meant by it.



They had settled nowhere since their marriage, for he had evinced an unaccountable restlessness, never seeming to care to live in the same place two days together, and they would not have remained so long in Brüssenburgh, had there not been a stringent reason that for the present Lady Rose should avoid more travelling than was necessary. That his sudden and most unexpected encounter with Véronique in Ste. Geneviève had been a great shock to him, there is little doubt. It would be a useless task to attempt to convince some people that it is possible Gordon Romilly may have loved this girl, and yet deserted her for the mere sake of money. We see men in this life constantly forsaking all for filthy lucre, selling their honour, their comfort, their health, even their daughters and wives for it ; but yet if we read of such a thing we cry, " Impossible !" and close the book. Therefore let each reader draw the conclusion from his conduct, which seems most natural to himself. But one thing is certain, that whatever his feelings concern-

ing her, he had thought of Véronique and dreamed of her far more since his marriage with Lady Rose Sellon than he had ever done in the days of their mutual affection, and although his dreams had always been of something far away, of something unattainable to him by touch, or sight, or word of mouth ; of nothing that could follow and claim him, or appeal to his compassion and his love with large mournful eyes, they had yet had the power to render him thoroughly miserable. For Gordon Romilly's greatest error, by which is meant his marriage with Lady Rose, had in a measure brought him to his senses. He had hurried on his life to that point, stifling his conscience with the assurance that his conduct was inevitable, but as soon as he had leisure to find out how great an evil he had done himself by deserting the creature whom he loved, his eyes were also opened to the injury he had wrought his wife, to the baseness with which he had acted towards both women, and at times he had pondered on his irremediable mis-

deeds, until he felt as though he should go mad.

When Véronique had risen up before him in the cathedral of Ste. Geneviève, and gazed upon him with so much tender reproach in her silent surprise, she had appeared like a resurrection from the dead to him ; so little idea had he that it would ever enter the head of the girl whom he had left, planted for life as he imagined, on the Neilgherry Hills, to follow him to Europe, and remind him of all the promises which he had made and broken.

His first impulse had been to fly to her side, and enquire by what means she had reached Brüssenburgh, his next, to slink out of her sight as though not worthy to stand in it, and to hide his shameful and dishonoured head at home.

What end would be answered by his speaking to her ? What could he say that should not add insult to injury, and make her hate him still more than she already must do. The title of "gentleman" Gordon Romilly felt was lost to him, but as a



man, could he stand before the woman he had so grossly injured, and tell her the plain truth?

It was not cowardice or fear that sent him hurrying from Ste. Geneviève, it was some such thoughts as these, which, whilst they bowed his head with conscious shame, did him more honour than most which he had conceived in those self-glorious days when he had been more god than man in the eyes of the woman who loved him.

As he walked home from that brief interview his mind was in a turmoil of trouble and confusion; he could not imagine under what circumstances Véronique Moore could be in Brüssenburgh, nor what he should do or say if he encountered her again, nor how he should execute the task, if it fell to him, of breaking the news to her of his own dishonour. He felt as though he must start at once for Paris or for England—run away, anywhere, in fact, so as to avoid an explanation with her, and had she given him the time to do so, in some such manner he would probably have acted. Indeed,



he had more than half settled on his future plans, when he turned out of his own house that evening, and found her tender grasp upon his arm.

He looked at her, first with surprise, then with horror, and lastly he staggered backwards as has been described, and they gazed at one another in bitter silence.

## CHAPTER VII.

### JE TE PARDONNE.

IT was an epoch to be remembered—such an epoch as but few men have the occasion to pass through, as occurs but once in the lifetime of any.

Gordon Romilly had no lack of physical courage ; he would have led a forlorn hope, or endangered his safety in defence of the helpless, with any other Englishman worthy of the name ; but his spirit quailed and his heart stood still beneath the searching gaze of the girl he had betrayed, and could the earth have swallowed him then and there, he would have been grateful for the release it afforded from the pain of having to stand before her, and confess himself a perjured man.

But Véronique gave him no time either for escape or reflection over what he should say to her. With eager energy she had seized his arm, determined to learn the truth to which she had a right, and when she found that he disengaged himself from her, and had not a word of welcome to bestow, her energy became despair, and she cared neither what she said to him, nor who should hear the story of her wrong.

“Gor-don !” she exclaimed, vehemently, as she strove in vain to meet the glance which he had lowered on the ground ; “ why will you not speak to me ? why do you avoid me thus ? have you forgotten who I am ? Is it for this that I have followed you from India ? ”

But not a syllable came in answer to her excited questions, and again she laid her hand upon his arm.

“ Speak—speak ! ” she said, almost in a tone of command, “ what have I done that you should not speak to me ? ” and then altering her voice to one of passionate entreaty, whilst she extended her hands to-

wards him, she continued, “*Gor-don ! mon bien-aimé*, one word, one single word !”

“Why are you here ?” he uttered hoarsely.

“Where else should I be ?” was the ready answer. “Why have I never seen you ? why have I never heard from you since the hour that we parted ? Père Joseph died believing you to be untrue to me, but I—I would *not* believe it until—until—this morning.”

“Is he dead ?” enquired Romilly, in the same strange tone.

“Yes ! he is dead !” she answered shortly, “he is happier than I, *Gor-don*. Tell me the truth ! I am here to know the truth—have you forgotten me ? have you ceased to love me ? have you given what is mine to another woman ?”

“Which question am I to answer first ?” he said evasively.

“Have you forgotten me ?” with a sharp decision of which he had not thought her capable.

“I have not.”



“Have you ceased to love me?” There were tears in the eyes of Véronique, as she put this question, and Gordon Romilly trembled as he answered it.

“By Heavens, no! I wish I had.”

At this assurance, notwithstanding the wish which accompanied it, her heart, so cold and pulseless but a moment before, bounded to a new measure, and her next query was put almost with hope.

“Have you given what is mine to any other woman?”

But to this there was no reply.

“*Il faut me répondre,*” she said passionately, “our marriage was a secret, Gordon—a secret which I have kept faithfully for your sake, which is known at present to no one but ourselves—but it made you mine, and if you deny it, I will proclaim it to the world. Is it true what I overheard that woman say this morning in Ste. Geneviève, that she calls you her husband, and believes herself to be your wife? She is not your wife, Gordon; she cannot be. You can have but one wife, and that is

*myself!*” and Véronique proudly drew her small figure up to its fullest extent.

“Hush! hush!” said her listener, almost fearfully, as he moved a few paces further from the vicinity of his own house.

“I *will not* ‘hush,’” returned the girl, fiercely, “I am your wife, and all Brüssenburg shall know it! I do not fear that other woman; I will go into her very presence, and tell her that she has taken my husband from me. What right has she—what *right* has she to claim you, or to believe herself your wife—you cannot marry twice—it is impossible!” and then, as her voice suddenly fell, she added, plaintively,

“Oh! Gor-don! Gor-don! I was the first, and I loved you so well! come back to me, and do not break my heart!”

He tried to answer her, but words failed him. To listen to the tender cadence of her voice, brought back so vividly the old time upon the Hills, those few short weeks in which she had been so much his darling and his own, that Gordon Romilly was overcome with the sense of the treachery of

which he had been guilty. He longed to caress and comfort her, he longed to tell her that he loved her still, but he dared do neither. He felt that with a knowledge of the truth she would learn to loathe him, and he could only walk by her side (they were moving slowly onwards now, to avoid attracting attention) in guilty silence.

“Am I not your wife?” she recommenced, her angry suspicions again roused by the strangeness of his manner.

“Oh! Véronique! I wish that I had never met you!” he replied, forced into saying something, “I wish that I had died before I had brought such a curse upon your innocent life as I have done!”

“Tell me the truth!” she said, gasping, as a dread fear seized hold upon her, “am I not your wife?”

He shook his head.

“How! *not?*” she repeated, in amazement, as stopping short she turned and flashed her eyes upon him. “Did not Père Joseph marry me to you in the little chapel?”



“Véronique!—” here Gordon Romilly made a dead halt, and then, swallowing something in his throat, went on so rapidly that his words were almost unintelligible—“Véronique, we were never married; I am not a Roman Catholic, I am a Protestant, our marriage was illegal; it was nothing at all, in fact, and when I came home—when I came home—” tapping the pavement nervously as he spoke, “when I returned to England—my family—that is to say by my father’s will—I found that—”

“*C’est assez!*” articulated a thick voice by his side. He glanced down at her, she was leaning against the wall, with dulled wide-open eyes, fixed upon the dark Boulevards opposite, and drawing her breath with so much difficulty, that each laboured stroke was painfully audible.

“Véronique!” he whispered, after a pause, during which the silence had been unbroken, “Véronique!” but she neither moved, nor shewed any symptom of having heard him speak.



Gordon Romilly grew alarmed.

“Véronique! don't look like that! reproach me! curse me, if you will! I know that I deserve everything that you may choose to say or do; you cannot make me more miserable than I have made myself; but don't refuse to speak, or you will drive me to do something desperate.”

But they had changed places now, it was his turn to implore, and hers to remain silent, and his words seemed to have no more effect upon her than on the brick and mortar against which she leaned. Gordon Romilly looked up and down the street, dreading lest some one should pass by and find them together in so strange a predicament; but Véronique still remained as though bereft of sense and feeling, staring into space.

“I can bear this no longer,” he exclaimed at last, and he strode away a few paces by himself. “Véronique,” he resumed, as he returned and made another effort to arouse her, “I dare not ask you even to enquire if there was any excuse for my conduct. I

know I am not worthy to stand in your presence, but yet, if you knew all, perhaps you might not think me so guilty as you do now. I was forced by my father's will either to marriage or a life of penury. I had no alternative, but I sealed my own misery in consenting to it."

Still she moved neither limb nor feature, and for aught that she appeared to hear or understand him, he might have held his discourse to the night. Stirred by intense compassion, no less than by remorse for the ruin he had effected, Gordon Romilly, in looking on the hopeless grief-stricken face before him, ventured to give expression to his real feelings concerning her.

"My poor darling!" he said, as he grasped her by the hand, "I would lay down my life to retrieve the injury I have done you!"

The words and action warmed the automaton to being, she snatched her hand from his, as though she had been stung, and her loud, wild peal of laughter rung through the almost deserted Boulevards,

startling the few passengers whose ears it chanced to meet.

“Your *life!*” she exclaimed, with a jeering intonation, which made his flesh creep. “What good would your life do me? would it bring back mine? would it restore what I have lost? what I have lost—what I have lost?” she repeated, her tones becoming less confident with each repetition of the words, until she ended in a burst of tears. There was nothing for Gordon Romilly to do but to stand still and look at her. In such a position a man is powerless to act, his arms are taken from him, he is bound and fettered, and his best refuge is in silence.

So he remained until the storm of the girl’s indignation had a little subsided, until she seemed less likely to be suffocated by her sobs, and the moaning which accompanied them had ceased. But just as he imagined that she was once more in a fit state to listen to him, and was preparing to address her, Véronique suddenly drew her handkerchief across her eyes, and turning



from him, started off in the direction whence she had come. This action was so rapid and unexpected in its performance, that she was some paces distant from him before he was aware of her intention; but his first impulse was to follow her. He felt that he could not part from her without one enquiry as to her means of support, her prospects or her destination, and in another minute he was by her side, earnestly entreating her to satisfy him on these points. But the manner in which Véronique denied his right to interest himself in her affairs, though perfectly ingenuous, might have been studied for the occasion.

“*Monsieur!*” she exclaimed, as with a haughty look she stopped for a moment to confront the man who had injured her, “*ce n’est pas votre affaire; je n’appartiens à personne; permettez que je vous quitte sans vous en dire davantage.*”

“My God!” exclaimed Gordon Romilly, struck by the change in her demeanour, “shall I never know then if I am forgiven?”



“ *Osez-vous le demander ?* ” she cried, indignantly. “ *Allez ! je ne veux plus vous voir,* ” and before the light which blazed upon him from her eyes, and the peremptory dismissal of her waving hand, he shrunk back, silenced and shame-stricken, and the woman who could address him in such a strain, whilst her heart was bursting beneath the sense that he was lost to her, was suffered to pursue her way without further interruption. So long as she felt he was in sight, and might be regarding her actions, Véronique walked firmly and upright, but as soon as she had left the Boulevards, and turned into the dark street leading to the boarding-house, her courage failed, a blurred mist fell before her eyes, a sick trembling seized upon her limbs, and tottering, she groped the rest of her way homewards, guiding herself by instinct rather than by sight. Mrs. Conway Jones was not yet home, nor likely to be so for some time, and having climbed the tedious staircase to her own apartment, Véronique sunk down into a chair, and attempted in some

measure to realise the position in which she found herself, and to recall the particulars of the interview she had just passed through with Gordon Romilly. But all was chaos and confusion, and she found it impossible to dwell on one subject for two seconds consecutively. Her mind, wearied with excess of grief, and stunned by the cruel blow she had received, was incapable of grasping any definite reflection, but wandered in a vague unreasoning manner over the area of the past, disinterring all those pleasant memories, the remembrance of which she had now most cause to shun, and holding them up before her mental vision as though in mockery of her desolation. In fancy she retraced every particular of her intimacy with Gordon Romilly, from the night on which he first came to her uncle's bungalow, and the accident through which she tended him, to the moment when he told her that he loved her, and the few blissful weeks which followed it. She thought of the simple monotonous life which she had led before she met him, and

how his coming had shed a glory for her on all earthly things, and how, when he had left her, gloom once more settled down upon the world. The little portion of existence which she had spent with him, seemed in the retrospect like a summer's dream, too bright and beautiful to last; but through the troubled sea of waiting and suspense which followed it, she had still kept in view the star of hope gleaming before her, to light her way to him; the dream had ceased, it was true, yet sleep had not been broken. But now she was awake, wide awake. Merciful Heaven! what an awakening!

The night was past, the sweet deep dream dissolved, day had broken, a dull, dark, hopeless day; and Véronique felt that she should never sleep or dream again.

Was it—could it be Gor-don to whom she had been speaking—Gor-don, to a meeting with whom she had but yesterday looked forward with such keen delight? Was it possible that she had seen him—



that her fondest hopes had been realised—that her tree of life had budded! and he had told her that she was nothing to him—*nothing*—that another held her place—that she was no one's wife!

Oh, God! how could he be so cruel!

Self-pity and compassion—pity for her blighted name, her wasted youth—and indignation against him who had dared so to waste and blight them, brought the scalding tears in torrents from her eyes; which jealousy of the woman who had usurped her rights, and desperation at the thought of her own impotency of revenge, changed the next moment into clenched hands and peals of hysterical laughter more hurtful than the most violent weeping.

And then, despair at the knowledge that she had finally lost him—that never more would she be folded in her lover's arms, nor cradle his fair head upon her bosom whose wife she had supposed herself to be—cast the unhappy girl, writhing and moaning on the ground, until unrestrained emotion had exhausted her powers of suf-



fering, except such as were conveyed by closed eyes and lips, and almost pulseless limbs.

Passing in this manner from one phase of feeling to another, Véronique had made herself completely ill before midnight brought her mistress home from the opera-house ; and when Mrs. Conway Jones, surprised at not finding her lady's-maid awaiting her as usual in the bed-room, and having (after continental fashion) no bell wherewith to summon her, climbed rather fretfully the wearisome ascent which led to her apartment, she was quite alarmed at the appearance she presented.

Pale and hollow-eyed, with feverish hands and head, and wild disordered tresses, Véronique looked like anything but a trim attendant fit for the performance of her dainty duty ; and when, in addition to her strange looks, she steadily refused to give any account of the means by which so marvellous a change had been effected, but only entreated her mistress to allow her to quit Brüssenburgh, the lady

was at a loss to understand what could have happened in her absence.

“I know, Madame,” faltered Véronique, “I know that I have no right to ask to leave your service before you have found some one to supply my place, and I will not do so if you insist upon my remaining, but if you can, Madame, pray let me go, for I am afraid I shall never again be of use to you—or any one.”

“But *why*, Moore?” expostulated Mrs. Conway Jones; “what is the matter that you should speak so strangely? Do you feel ill, or have you heard bad news?”

But the only answer she received was conveyed by a half-stifled sob, and hands crushed suddenly together, as though to smother pain between them.

“Let me go, Madame! I entreat you to let me go,” repeated Véronique, as soon as she could speak; “I am not well; this place does not agree with me; I shall never be fit for anything in Brüssenburgh again.”

The lady descended to take counsel with her husband. With feminine instinct, she

had dived to the bottom of the girl's secret, the mystery was no longer a mystery with her.

“Of course it is some stupid love affair,” she said in a tone of annoyance. “I suppose the man won't have anything more to say to her, and so I am to suffer for it. It is excessively provoking—and just as I have taught her to do my hair. What am I to say to her, Conway? If I refuse to let her go, she may give me a month's warning, and insist on her wages. It is sure to be an inconvenience any way.”

But Mr. Conway Jones, having heard all the particulars of Véronique's condition that his wife was enabled to give him, took a different view of the matter, and put her on another scent.

“By Jove! Cissy, my darling!” he exclaimed, “I'd lay anything she's sickening for the fever,” alluding to an epidemic which was prevalent in Brüssenburgh at the time.

Mrs. Conway Jones gave a slight cry, and turned pale even through her rouge.



She was callous to dishonour, use being second nature ; but she greatly feared death ; and the thought of infection was terrible to her.

“ Do you really think so ? ” she enquired in accents of horror.

“ By Jove ! I should consider it very probable,” replied her husband, who being, notwithstanding his cunning, much less clever than his wife, liked to establish a reputation for being the sharper of the two. “ Don’t you remember how she fainted at old Trappeniers’ the other day, and how queer she was after that attack ; and you remarked yourself yesterday that she had seemed very restless and strange lately. Depend upon it, it’s the fever coming on, Cissy, my darling ! and the sooner you get her out of the house the better.”

“ Oh, what *shall* we do ? ” exclaimed Mrs. Conway Jones, who, although indolently good-natured to domestics when her own interests were not concerned, was too much alarmed on the present occasion to take thought for any one but herself. “ She



can't leave the house till to-morrow morning, but I won't go near her again. You must go, Conway, and tell her she may leave as soon as ever she likes, in fact that she *must* leave as soon as ever she can ; for I have my dear children to think of, remember ; and what on earth would become of them were anything to happen to me," and Mrs. Jones drooped her eyelids and looked maternal.

"By Jove! though, it isn't a pleasant task to give a man, Cissy, my darling," replied her lord and master, who was almost as much afraid of being infected as she was, "but if it is to be done, I had better go at once, for I dare say she'll be twice as bad to-morrow morning as she is now."

"Oh dear! don't speak of it," exclaimed Mrs. Conway Jones in alarm ; "if I had had any notion the tiresome girl was going to be ill I would have sent her away a week ago. Who knows what we may not have taken in the interim? Tell her, Conway, that she must leave the house as soon as ever she can to-morrow morning ; and pray

go out of doors yourself and smoke a cigar before you come near me again."

"And of course she can't demand her wages," said the gentleman, waiting for his final instructions.

"Of course not," was the decided reply; "she ought to pay us something for the risk we have run. Pray go at once, Conway, and give her her dismissal. I only trust it may not be too late."

Thus urged, Mr. Conway Jones found his way up to the room of his wife's lady's-maid; and, having knocked boldly at the door, was answered by a feeble "*entrez,*" on the part of Véronique.

"I don't wish to come in," he replied; and the unexpected sound of his voice roused the girl to listen to him. "I have brought you a message from your mistress, Moore! How do you feel now?"

"I will open the door, Monsieur," she said wearily, as she rose from her seat.

"No, no, no!" exclaimed her master hastily, "don't do that. I have no wish to come in personal contact with you; I only want to know how you feel?"

“ I am all right, Monsieur, thank you !” though the tone of her voice belied her words.

“ But your mistress says that you look very ill, and that you wish to leave Brüs-senburgh at once. Have you a pain in your head, Moore ?”

“ Very great, Monsieur.”

“ And are your hands hot ?”

“ Hot and dry.”

“ And do you feel an occasional shivering or trembling in your limbs ?”

“ I have felt it more than once to-day, Monsieur.”

“ By Jove !” exclaimed Mr. Jones, as he backed several inches from the key-hole. “ By Jove ! Moore, I am afraid you are going to be ill.”

“ I don't think so, Monsieur, but I cannot tell. I should be thankful to get home amongst my own people.”

“ Of course ; and so you shall—so you shall !” replied her master with ready acquiescence ; “ in fact I came up to tell you, Moore, that your mistress thinks the sooner



you go the better. There's a great deal of fever about the town just at present, you know, and were you taken ill here, and my duties carried me off in another direction, you would feel very lonely without your friends, so you will be much better off in the country, and Mrs. Jones will put up with the inconvenience of losing you as best she can."

"She is very good, Monsieur. I may depart then to-morrow?"

"Yes, certainly; as early as ever you like, Moore. And look here!" continued Mr. Conway Jones confidentially, as he reapproached the bedroom door, "your mistress is very delicate, you know, and I am obliged to be careful that she runs no risks, therefore it will be advisable for you to get away as quietly as you can, and without asking to see us again. Leave before breakfast, if it is possible, and I will break the news of your departure to her after you are gone."

Véronique smiled. Even in the midst of the misery by which this sudden separ-



ation was occasioned, she could not help smiling as she traced the motives which had led to so amiable an acquiescence in her desire. But she only answered—

“I will do as you wish, Monsieur.”

“And of course,” said her employer in conclusion, “of course, Moore, you wouldn’t expect to receive your wages when you ask to leave your mistress at a moment’s warning. You are putting her to immense inconvenience, as you must be aware, and probably to expense in finding some one to supply your place, so the least you can do is to go quietly, without making any fuss about it, and—”

“It shall be so, Monsieur,” she answered calmly, “you need not fear. I am only too thankful to be allowed to go.”

“And — and — you will leave early, Moore?” said Mr. Conway Jones with a final precaution.

“I will leave the first thing in the morning,” she answered wearily. She was tired of the discussion, tired of the suspicions which she knew were groundless, and of the cowardly prudence to

which they had given rise, and she longed for the moment when her master should take his departure and leave her alone with her great grief. So Mr. Conway Jones, having neatly accomplished his mission, groped his way down stairs again, and walked out at the front door to take the disinfecting cigar which his wife had insisted on his smoking before he rejoined her, and Véronique sat down once more before the corpse of her dead hope, and gazed upon it with wild wandering eyes, to which no sleep would come, till the early, rising sun peeped in at the bed-room window, and she looked at him with a sickly smile as she felt that with his rising a fresh life had commenced for her—a life above the loneliness of which his beams would never again have the power to shed either warmth or happiness.

When he had risen, she rose also, and having bathed her face and eyes, and arranged her disordered tresses, made such slight preparations as were necessary to be done before she could leave Brüssenburgh.

As she busied herself thus she was conscious but [of one feeling, an intense longing to get it over and be gone. Of all other powers of sensation she seemed to have been suddenly bereft; her eyes were dry and tearless, her limbs no longer trembled, her heart was dead within her breast, and every part of her body seemed so weary as to be utterly incapable of expressing any further emotion. To quit the spot which held Gordon Romilly gave her no extra pain; to visit that which, at one time, it had been her most ardent desire to see, no pleasurable anticipation. For the one feeling the time was over; for the other it had not yet arrived; and to Véronique, time past or future, seemed for the present to be nothing. Her intended destination was naturally Rêve, she was not expected there, that is to say, a period for her going had not yet been mentioned, but as she placed amongst her other possessions the letter which she had received from her aunt, *Sœur Marie*, and from David, (could it have been but the day before that she had



received them ?) she knew she should be welcome, and the very name of the place made it more like going home to her than any other place could have been. She had a small sum of money which had been sent her by David in case of any emergency, therefore the loss of the trifling amount of wages which was due to her she did not feel, and before Mrs. Conway Jones had quitted her bed that morning, her infected lady's-maid had left Brüssenburgh far behind her, and was speeding towards Rêve. For the first half of the journey (which altogether occupied about four hours) Véronique took little notice of the country through which she passed, but stared in a vacant manner on the objects which surrounded her, and could scarcely have said afterwards whether Belgium were flat and sterile, or wooded and productive. But when the train entered the province which held Rêve she could not fail to become interested. The rich valleys, the swelling hills, the fertile plains, and the flowing streams, of which she had so often heard



Père Joseph speak, attracted her attention, first for their own beauty, and next for the sake of him who had described them to her ; and as she looked on the scene which he had loved so well, and pondered on what he would have suffered had he lived to see her seek a refuge in them when heartbroken and betrayed, she thanked Heaven that he had been spared that sorrow, and in doing so shed quiet tears, which strengthened instead of weakening her. By noon she had reached Rêve, but before that time had gained sufficient control over herself to enable her to appear before her adopted brother and her new relations, without betraying the secret of her outraged affection. She knew she had that secret still to keep—for Gordon Romilly's sake no less than for her own—and faithless though he had proved to her, the heart of Véronique was as truly his as on the day she first confessed it to be so. And, therefore, when she so unexpectedly broke in on David's solitude that afternoon, pouring a flood of sunshine over his existence by her welcome

presence, although he found her thinner, paler, and in many respects altered since their separation, he was ready to attribute the change to loneliness, or service, or fatigue, or to anything in fact, rather than the truth—that the child's heart was broken.

\* \* \* \* \*

And so this most important episode in her life was ended ; the brief indulgence of her love for Gordon Romilly was a by-gone thing, a book which had been opened and read, and closed and put away again. Closed and laid upon the shelf, but forgotten by either of the actors in the short, sad drama inscribed upon its pages—to her a memory sorrowful, but most sacred—to him a root of bitterness, which bore fresh fruit with every thought that linked him to the past !

A past which did not become less dear to his remorseful spirit, when after he had left Brüssenburgh some months for Paris, a letter in Véronique's handwriting which

had been sent to the old address, was forwarded to him there, and on opening the envelope he found a strip of paper with these simple words upon it—

“*Je te pardonne.*”

## CHAPTER VIII.

### TWO YEARS AFTERWARDS.

Two years ! is it a long or short period of which to have to record the events ? It is long enough, under ordinary circumstances, for most of the accidents of life ; long enough to be born in, and cut one's teeth ; to be married, and become fathers and mothers ; to make a decent exit from the world, and enter on that never-ceasing holiday, to which death, for such as choose, is but precursory. Yet on the other hand, it is a short time in which to build a fortune, to complete an education, or to climb to the attainment of a high ambition, and it may be added, that for hearts which have truly loved, and sincerely lamented, it is a very short time in which to learn to forget.



It was just two years after the events recorded in the last chapter, that the Peninsular and Oriental Company's steamship, "Sultana," was lying at anchor before Aden, where she had arrived but an hour previously, and was to remain until the same evening, for the purpose of taking in coal.

A great confusion was visible amongst the passengers on board, not only on account of the anxiety, natural to men who had been at sea for weeks, to place their feet on land once more, even though it were represented by a strip of burning sand; but because on entering the harbour, the first sight which had met their view, had been that of the steamer of the week before, lying disabled and useless, having sustained some injury to her paddle-wheel; and the first news by which they had been greeted, that they were expected to take on both her mails, and her passengers.

And if there is one thing which the temporary inmates of a vessel dislike more than another, it is these sudden raids upon

their comfort by adventitious cargo, which threaten to overload the cabins, and cause provisions to run short. The decks of the "Sultana," on the present occasion, resembled a disturbed ant-hill, or an upset beehive ; and her first-class passengers ran up and down stairs, and in and out of the saloon, adjuring the stewards, calculating the inconvenience to which they were likely to be subjected, and condoling one another on the evil which had befallen them ; whilst the second-class, or steerage passengers, sat *en masse* at the end of the vessel appropriated to them, and kept up a continual buzz of grumbling discontent.

Just as they had arrived at the hottest and most unpleasant part of the voyage, when they wanted all the air, and all the space, (and precious little they got for their money any way,) that it was possible to give them ; when they could scarcely sleep at night for the stifling heat, and pudding had already been stopped on two days in the week ; to have a lot of strangers turned in amongst them, to shake down as they

best could, was a thing to be borne quietly by no man.

It was shameful ! it was too bad ! it was robbing them of the money which they had laid out to secure a pleasant voyage, and if the "Arabia" had broken down, her passengers ought to be made to pay the penalty of the misfortune, and to wait until she was repaired, instead of being handed over to another vessel to take the food out of honest people's mouths, and to upset all their comfort. They were told that an important personage, the new Resident Councillor of Macao, or some such place, going out to take up his appointment, was amongst the passengers of the "Arabia," and that it was essential he should at once proceed to his destination, but what cared they for Resident Councillors, or men in authority, when they interfered with their personal convenience ! Their gold was as good as a Resident Councillor's any day, and when they paid down their money, they were entitled to their money's worth ; and did not see why they



should be put out of their way, were it for Queen Victoria herself.

So they argued, in a thoroughly dogged British style, delighted to have found a grievance for discussion, and almost forgetting in the pleasures of discontent, that they had ever expressed a wish to set their feet upon Arabian soil. Aden, on its flat and sandy desert, lay stretched before them ; grinning natives, hideous enough by nature, and rendered still more so, by having the hair of their heads dyed bright red, bobbed up and down in the water, beneath the stem of the vessel, clamorous for coin to be dropped, that they might exhibit their feats of diving ; and a fleet of small boats surrounded the "Sultana," ready to convey them on shore, and yet they still clustered together on the after-deck, grumbling in each other's ears, and missing in their discontent what might have distracted their thoughts from the imaginary ills they were bewailing.

Not that it was altogether unlikely that an innovation of strangers might some-



what interfere with their comfort, for there was a large number of them, and they seemed to belong to every class and nation. Servants, English, Hindoo, and Chinese, belonging to the different ladies on board; French and German workmen, either returning to their duties, or seeking a fortune; soldiers' wives, about to join their husbands; Roman Catholic priests proceeding to their respective stations; all sorts and distinctions of the lower ones of the earth, appeared to have their representatives, amongst the steerage passengers of the "Sultana," and there were even two or three flapping white caps to be seen in the crowd, denoting that she was carrying out "Sisters of Mercy," to pursue their deeds of benevolence beneath the burning sun of India.

But presently, a more powerful incentive than the entreaties of the native boatmen, or the attractions of Aden, as seen at mid-day, was brought to bear upon the feelings of these discontented ones, and to induce them to drop their discussion, and take refuge on the shore. Coaling commenced,

and everyone who could, got out of the way of the clouds of dust which settled on each available part of the steamer, and brought blackened faces and ruined garments in their train.

Each little pleasure-boat had soon received its load, and was dancing over the bright blue waves towards the town of Aden ; whilst the red-headed divers, (although capable of sustaining their position in the water for hours together,) seeing how fast the vessel was discharging cargo, considered it hardly worth their while to grin at closed ports and empty decks all day, and with a final appeal, turned round likewise and made for home. At last, there was but a sprinkling of people left upon the steamer, and of these, the majority were also making preparation for departure.

“ Are you not going on shore, my son ? ” enquired a Roman Catholic priest of a young native attired in European clothing, who was leaning over the ship’s side ; “ for if so, we will journey together.”

The man whom he addressed, turned round quickly, displaying a happy and contented face. It was our old friend, David, looking much the same as when we left him, excepting that the two years' interval had brought an expression of peace to his countenance, which in his vain struggles to obtain that which was not designed for him, it had lacked before.

“I should very much like to go,” he answered readily, “but I must ask Sœur Marie first, what she intends to do,” and rising as he spoke, he crossed to the other side of the deck, and stopped before one of the women who wore black dresses, and broad white flapping caps.

“Will you come on shore, *ma sœur*?” he enquired, briskly. “Père Martin and I intend taking a boat together. There may not be much to see there, but you will be subject to a great deal of annoyance from this coal-dust if you remain on board.”

“But I would rather stay where I am, David!” replied Sœur Marie, gently.

“I shall not like to leave you alone,



Marie! All the world is quitting the steamer, and you will be so dull by yourself."

She smiled, but rather sadly.

"Do not be afraid of that, *mon frère*— I have my books and my beads, and I am never dull or lonely. Go and see Aden; and enjoy yourself, if possible. I shall be quite contented with a description of the place on your return."

"You are feeling well, Marie?"

"Quite well, David, quite well and— happy," she added, after a little pause; and upon that the young man left her, and with Père Martin proceeded to the shore, whilst she took her station by the side of the vessel, and watched their progress till they disappeared.

It was Véronique, but so changed, so greatly changed from the days when she had nursed Hope upon her bosom, that even without the dark mourning robes and disfiguring head-dress which she wore, it would have been difficult to recognise her. Her luxuriant hair had been cut short in



accordance with the usages of the community which she had joined; her face, always small and oval-shaped, was now so thin and pale as to look positively insignificant—lost, as it appeared, in the huge recesses of her cap, and her large blue eyes, glowing like sapphires, with their unabated fire, were the only possessions she retained, which could remind even herself of the girl she once had been.

And yet she had not passed her twentieth birthday—it was barely three years since she had first met Gordon Romilly on the Neilgherry Hills!

It would be useless in this place to enter on a dissertation upon Love. It is too much the fashion in the present century to laugh at the notion of any one keeping faithful to a memory, and to call the believer in such faith “romantic,” and his ideas “high-flown.” People who have never loved, or who judge of others by their outward bearing only, find it hard to credit the fact that many with whom they daily laugh and talk, have had their whole lives over-

shadowed by one disappointment, and that it is quite possible to eat, and drink, and sleep, and do one's duty, and yet be a very unjoyous man or woman.

But if there are few men who can enter into this credence, there ought to be few women who are not ashamed to deny it,

“ Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,  
'Tis woman's whole existence,”

and she who does not second this assertion is probably she whose existence has never been put to the test.

But it is generally the woman's *first* lover to whom she keeps so faithful. If her first lover remain so, she may grow to value him less, but if she loses him, by death or separation, or even treachery, his vices become writ in water, whilst his virtues are engraven on a rock. Other men may spring up to adore her, and, after a fashion, she may return their love, but it is questionable if, when she poured out the full libation of her affection for the conqueror of

her youth, she left much else than dregs for later comers.

And Véronique had been no exception to this rule. On the sad day when she had quitted Brüssensburgh, bereft of everything which made life dear to her, she had left it with a broken heart, which “brokenly” lived on; yet had had its best and purest gifts, its childlike faith and trust, and virginal pride, shattered and despoiled.

She had entered Rêve with but one desire—the wish conceived by every young untried spirit when first subjected to the bitter yoke of disappointment—that she might be allowed to die; to leave the load of misery which oppressed her far behind, and go to some place where recollection was not, and men, things unknown; and for a length of time the shock she had received in finding Gordon Romilly was faithless, had rendered her incapable of soaring to any higher or better aspiration. But after a period youth and nature had their way, the wildness of her grief became subdued, peace, in a measure, returned to her bosom,



and Véronique was enabled to believe that though deserted and betrayed, all was not yet over for her.

She had found good friends in Rêve.

Kindly men, and simple-hearted women, connections of her dead mother and Père Joseph, had stretched forth their hands to her, and bid her welcome in tones not to be mistaken, and imagining that the restless and despondent state in which she appeared amongst them, arose from bodily illness, had done more by their indirect attentions towards effecting a cure, than if they had guessed the secret of her malady.

Her aunt Sœur Marie (in memory of whose kindness, no less than because all things connected with the past had grown distasteful to her, Véronique had adopted her present name) had received her as a daughter, and would have been charmed to keep her always by her side in the *Maison religieuse*, of which she was a member ; but before she had been long in Rêve the girl had commenced to form other plans for herself, to which she was induced, partly from



the example of her adopted brother, and partly from the necessity for action making itself known in her nature.

As soon as David found himself again with Véronique, he had confided to her that the great wish of his heart was to become a missionary, which desire it appeared had been conceived by him some time previously, but he had waited to communicate it to her until he should have consulted a priest upon the subject. Finding, however, that all that was required, beside a religious education, to fit him for the work, was a hearty resolution to perform his duty, he was already pursuing his studies for that purpose, but declared that he had no intention of making a final decision, until he had ascertained Véronique's opinion with regard to the matter.

“ You are all I have, Véronique !” he had said on that occasion. “ I have no family, no friends, no relations, and as you know well, I shall never marry. I should like to devote myself to the cause of my own people ; I believe I shall experience more

happiness in such a life than in any other : but I have promised to be the guardian of your interests, and if I can be of use to you by remaining at your side, I will give up this project immediately !” And as he concluded, David had looked up in her face, almost hoping perhaps to see a shade of disappointment there at the prospect of their separation. But Véronique had remained unmoved.

“ It is your duty,” she had answered him, “ I will not keep you from it, David, for a moment, on the contrary I urge you to persevere. I cannot see my own way plainly yet, but I also shall never marry : I am quite assured of that, and if it is possible, I will help you in your undertaking.”

And so from this, it had grown at last to be understood amongst the people of Rêve, that Véronique Moore and the young native were amongst them only for a season, and that as soon as the term of probation of the one, and the religious education of the other, should be completed, she

would leave them as a sister of mercy, and he as a missionary, to carry back the consolations of religion to the inhabitants of the country where they had alike received their birth.

But Véronique had taken no vows upon herself, she was free to pursue her occupation or to leave it, as seemed best to her : and her name and garb were but marks of the cause to which she was devoted.

The two years she had spent at Rêve had not been passed unhappily, for the simple duties entailed on her by the rules of the *maison religieuse* in which she abode had proved as balm to her aching heart : and although time was powerless to give her back what she had lost, his influence had considerably softened the smarting of the wound. And David had profited by its effects still more than she had ; indeed so ably had the preparation for his profession filled up the gap in his life, once made by her rejection of him, that Véronique sometimes caught herself smiling to think he could be the same man who had pleaded



with tears for her affection, and considered existence not worth having when she denied it to him. Now his whole heart and soul seemed absorbed by the prospect of his new duties, and he never even alluded to the days when it had been otherwise with him. He mixed freely with her, and evidently without pain : their intercourse was reduced to that of warm and steadfast friends, but nothing more, and his attachment had become in consequence a greater comfort to her than it had ever proved before.

As soon as he was considered eligible to undertake the work to which he aspired, David had accepted an offer on the part of the Roman Catholic Mission to send him out to China, where they were in great need of help : and Véronique had decided to accompany him, although her own wish had been that they should return to the Neilgherry Hills : and David still thought, (considering the length of the voyage to, and the dangers of the climate of, the place for which he was bound) it would have



been much better had she consented to proceed there and dwell amongst her friends until circumstances enabled him to rejoin her.

But in some respects the conduct of Véronique was inexplicable to him.

That he had guessed that her deep melancholy and repugnance to himself arose from a disappointed love, was certain ; and that he had also connected this love with Gordon Romilly (which fact had much aided him in weaning himself from her) there was little doubt : but it was only conjecture on his part, and he knew too little to enable him to find a clue to the reason of several actions on hers. Why, for instance, Véronique always avoided the company of young girls, and shrunk in general from the society of women, excepting that of the sisters, he had been quite at a loss to determine ; nor why she had so steadfastly refused to quit the village of Rêve, all the time they lived there, even for a day's jaunt to Brüssenburgh. But above everything he had been puzzled to

understand her repeated refusal to use the hundred pounds which Père Joseph had left for her sole benefit, even for the expense of her outfit and voyage; nor why, at the last, she had insisted upon depositing it in the hands of the *curé* of Rêve, to be kept for the relief of the poor of his parish, and prepared to follow him to China as a servant of the mission: which accounted for her being amongst the steerage passengers of the "Sultana."

No! David would never understand her, nor would anyone in this world again; there was a sealed book in her bosom, of which the Almighty and herself alone held the key. Véronique felt this at all times, and never more deeply than when the young missionary accompanied Père Martin on shore at Aden, and left her sitting by herself on the after-deck, watching with eyes too calm not to be sad, for a girl of twenty, the boat which bore him from her. Gazing upon scenes, which though strange, still powerfully reminded her of the country where she had spent her happiest days,

could not fail to make her thoughtful, and as she looked at them, the various passages in her brief life, which the sorrow, and the change, and the monotony of the last two years, had almost effaced from her remembrance, flashed across it once more, making her start to find how completely their influence had been absorbed or obliterated: and what a difference time had made for her in every respect but one—almost as great a difference (so Véronique sighed to herself,) as it had caused in her appearance.

Mrs. Colonel Dowdson, grown considerably more sour from the effect of disappointment, was still undergoing her term of penal servitude in second-rate furnished apartments in England, and wearing the Colonel's life out with entreaties that he would take her away from a land where there are no government house dinners, and no bands, and where one's friends are independent, and a colonel is but a name. And Mr. and Mrs. Conway Jones, grown sharper by experience if not more wise, were still taking houses in places where



they were unknown, and furnishing them on credit, and running off to the Continent at dead of night, followed by the execrations of servants and tradespeople; but Véronique had scarcely given either of her mistresses a thought since she had separated from them, so completely had all things (even the previous suffering and suspense) been forgotten in the pain of that culminating blow which tore the veil down from her trusting eyes, and killed all that was worth calling life in her.

With the discovery that she had no husband, no lover, nothing that she could call her own; that her affection had been outraged, and her confidence made a thing to mock at, the face of earth had changed for Véronique.

Nothing was the same as it once had been. As she thought this, leaning over the side of the "Sultana," gazing sadly upon Aden, the poor child's lips trembled, and the tears welled into her eyes. Père Joseph was dead, David cooled, (as she reviewed the alterations made by time, she



was almost ready to quarrel with the fact upon which she had so often congratulated herself) ; even Rêve, that quiet harbour from the ills of life, she had voluntarily left behind, and launched herself upon the world to let destiny drive her where it would. So be it ! there were none to care where she was driven, and why should she fear death or danger since she had nothing left to live for ? She knew the kingdom to which, hour by hour, she was hastening : she believed most heartily in the communion of saints, and she prayed each day, that when she obtained admission at the gates of pearl, she might recognise one face amongst the throng of the redeemed. And that was the dearest hope that Gordon Romilly had left to Véronique Moore.

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She did not seem to mind the coal dust. The other "*Sœurs de Charité*," who had nothing to do with herself or David, being bound for Madras, had disappeared below, to shield their spotless linen from con-

tamination, and more than one of the ship's officers advised "the little Sister," (as they called Véronique, amongst themselves,) to follow the example of her companions : but still she sat on deck, apparently regardless of her comfort, but occupied with her book or her own thoughts, until the afternoon was nearly spent, and the unpleasant business of coaling was completed, and the boats began to put out again from shore, and bring back their freights to the "Sultana ;" amongst which came a host of passengers from the disabled steamer of the week before. It amused Véronique to watch them all getting on board, to see the new faces full of expectation, and the old ones freshened up by their short holiday, and to look at the treasures, in the shape of ostrich feathers, fans, and other Aden curiosities, with which they appeared laden. She was hanging over the ship's side, deeply interested in what passed before her, when her attention was suddenly attracted by the occupants of a boat which had just come along-side, and, with the exception of

an English servant and a little child, seemed to carry no more valuable cargo than bundles and boxes.

The child, a boy of from eighteen months to two years old, at once caught the eyes of Véronique, who was exceedingly fond of children, and she kept them fixed upon his little curly head of flaxen hair, whilst the process of getting his attendant and himself on board was being effected.

The nurse, who was magnificently attired for a domestic, and seemed much more anxious to preserve her silk dress than her little charge from the contact of salt water, came mincing and tripping up the slippery gangway in so careless a manner, that as she stepped on deck she missed her footing, and had not Véronique started forward to prevent it, would have been thrown, together with the child, upon the ground.

“Oh ! la ! I’m sure I’m vastly obliged to you,” exclaimed the stranger as she looked with impertinent surprise on the garb of the woman who had helped her. “I never know where I’m going to on these horrid



ships ; to my mind there ain't two of them built alike. Come now ! you stop your noise, sir !” she added with a warning shake to the boy, who was roaring lustily from the fright he had sustained. “ I've got all your mamma's boxes to look after, and if you ain't quiet I'll put you down.”

“ Let me hold him for you,” pleaded Véronique as she stretched out her arms towards the child.

“ That you may and welcome, if he'll go to you,” replied the servant, “ but he is a cross-grained child as ever was, and don't take to strangers. Come now, Master Too-too ! I've had enough of this ; nursesey will put you on the deck if you don't stop crying this very minute.”

“ How many boxes had you in all, Miss ?” demanded the man who was standing at the gangway and seeing the luggage brought up.

“ Seventeen, I think—no ! wait—that was counting the three baskets, but I've got a memorandum here if this tiresome child would only let me get at it. Hold



him a minute, do !” she continued, as without ceremony she popped him into the arms of Véronique, and began to search her pockets for the required document.

“Don’t cry, Too-too ! be a good boy, darling,” said the little Sister of Mercy in her most soothing voice, and Too-too stopped his wailing with surprise and turned two enormous blue eyes upon her. Such eyes ! so clear, and full, and deeply blue. Véronique never remembered to have seen such before—except once—except once. She hardly knew at first why the sight of them so powerfully affected her—why her heart should beat faster and her breast heave as Too-too opened his baby orbs, and solemnly regarded his new friend ; but the next moment she had remembered—and a flash of pain darted across her heart at the remembrance.

“Never mind, Too-too, nurse is soon coming back !” she said with a quivering lip, as she commenced to pace up and down the deck in anticipation of the child screaming at her, but Too-too cried no more, and

when his nurse appeared to reclaim him she found him engaged in a silent examination of Véronique's cap and beads.

“Well, I never!” exclaimed that worthy as she jerked him over her shoulder, “wonders will never cease! I expected he would have howled his head off by this time. Do you know where our cabin is, for I'm dead tired, and the sooner I can pack the brat away the better? When once his ma comes on board she won't let anyone be attended to but herself.”

“The stewardess will tell you,” replied Véronique, “and if you go down the companion stairs, you will find her cabin at the bottom. I cannot show you the way because I am a steerage passenger. Good-bye, baby! I hope he will sleep well.”

“Oh! la! I hope so, too, or I shall have his pa a fussing in and out of the cabin all night to ask what's the matter with him. Down the stairs you say? thank you. Just disengage his hand from your beads, will you, or he'll have them all over the deck. That's it. Now, sir, you stop your

noise," and off she bore Master Too-too in a fresh burst of lamentation at having his new plaything wrested from him, whilst Véronique, after having looked wistfully at the child until he disappeared, went down to her own stifling little cabin and had a quiet cry all to herself.

She might deny it as much as she chose—might assure herself again and again that the past was past with her, and that she had conquered all those vain longings and regrets that had at one time threatened to overthrow her reason; but from her agitation at the least thing which reminded her of her lost happiness—even though it were but the colour of a baby's eyes—Véronique knew that her love for Gordon Romilly was unabated.

## CHAPTER IX.

### TOO-TOO.

THE first thought which flashed into Véronique's mind on awaking the following morning, was the thought of the blue-eyed baby, and it was with all expedition that she dressed herself and ran on deck in anticipation of seeing him again.

As she set her foot upon the topmost rung of the companion-ladder, a strange sight presented itself to her view. The nights were now exceedingly warm, and in consequence, many of the passengers of the "Sultana," both first and second-class, had taken to abandoning their legitimate sleeping places, and carrying their beds into the open air, to which custom, the inroads made



upon their comfort by the innovation of the day before had added considerable force. So that the deck of the steamer was now strewn with mattresses, and pillows, and shawls, upon which lay indiscriminately occupants of both sexes, and in all stages of *déshabille*.

Véronique turned from the half-opened eyes and yawning mouths presented to her with disgust ; the custom was one with which, under any circumstances, she never could have familiarized herself, and which under the present she would have considered positively improper, and she felt it to be quite a relief when the usual matutinal pails of water were unceremoniously emptied over the ship's planks, and the startled sleepers, in dread of being soaked through, if not washed overboard, were compelled in all haste to take up their beds and walk, leaving the deck clear for earlier risers. Véronique took a seat as near the quarter-deck as it was permissible for her to do, keeping her eyes fixed on the stairs which led from the saloon ; and the water

had not dried upon the flooded planks before, amidst a train of other nurses and children, she caught sight of her acquaintance of the previous evening, bearing the little child who had so wonderfully taken her fancy, and greatly to her pleasure, the woman at once recognised and approached her.

“Well! you *are* early!” was her greeting, “I am sure I thought no one would have been out of their beds who wasn’t obliged to. But such a night as I’ve passed, you never see! Four mortal souls beside the child, packed into one cabin, and two of them as sick as though they’d never been a board a ship before. You may fancy I was glad enough to get out of it.”

“I am sorry!” said Véronique, who had already got her fingers entwined in those of the baby, “and how did baby sleep—comfortably?”

“Oh! he’d have slept well enough if his pa had only let him be; but the child can’t turn in his bed without he’s after us, to

know if he wants this, that, or the other, and her ladyship's she's just the opposite, and comes down on me if the baby cries, as though I'd done it. They're just a pair on them, they are, and if I'd known half what I should have to go through, I wouldn't never have consented to leave England. However, it's only for a year, that's one comfort."

"Is the gentleman only going out for a year, then?" demanded Véronique, who had got the baby on her lap by this time, and was letting him play with the string of wooden beads and crucifix which she wore pendant from her side.

"La! my dear, I can't tell you," replied the nurse, who was nothing loath to be relieved of her heavy young charge. "I only know that I engaged myself for twelve months, and no more, and that's twice too long, in my ideas, to go and live amongst heathen."

Véronique sighed. She had engaged herself to live all the remainder of her life amongst heathen, and she knew that how-

ever right the resolution, she was not yet reconciled to it.

“Where are you going to?” she asked, quietly.

“To some outlandish place in China, I believe, but I never can remember the name, and why the master, who had a beautiful house and all that heart could wish for in London, beside a whole heap of lords to his relations, should leave them to take up his dwelling amongst a lot of niggers, I can't think ; but some folks must be always hankering after a change ; and to drag this poor babe along with them too ! I call it a shame, they'd better by half have left him at home with his grandma.”

“But I suppose they love him very much,” said Véronique, as she pressed her lips to the crown of his little flaxen poll. “It would have been terribly hard to leave him behind.”

The woman laughed.

“Well ! you *do* seem a one for babies ! though, as far as his pa goes, I expect you're right. Master Too-too is the apple



of his eye, I don't think he cares for much else in this mortal world ; but as for her ladyship, she'd have been precious glad to leave him at home with her own ma ; in fact, she stood out for it a long time, but the master was one too many for her—as he generally is—he said he wouldn't go without the child, and no more he would.”

“ Oh ! I don't wonder at it ! ” exclaimed Véronique, warmly, “ such a sweet little baby as he seems ; if he were mine, I would never part with him.”

Too-too's nurse stared at her, as though unable to comprehend her meaning.

“ Lor ! now,” she said, after a pause ; “ but that's strange, isn't it ? for you can't never marry yourself, can you ? ”

Véronique turned scarlet, and bent her head over the child, until her glowing face was concealed by her wide head-dress.

“ Oh ! no ! no ! ” she answered, hurriedly, “ and you mistake me, I never wish to do so, but I love little children, I can't help it, I always did. There is nothing I should like better than to have the entire

charge of a dear little child like this. I would never leave him, night or day."

"Ah! well, I expect you'd sing to a different tune after you'd had him to sleep along with you a few nights," said the nurse, laughing. "He's terrible fractious at times with his teeth. But if you really have such a fancy for children, perhaps you wouldn't mind holding him a bit, while I just run down and see after getting her ladyship up for breakfast. His pa takes him in general for me, but I don't think he's up himself this morning."

"Oh! I shall be so pleased if you will trust him to me," said poor Véronique, her careworn face quite brightening at the idea of being left in charge of the blue-eyed baby. "I will take the greatest care of him, I will not leave him for a minute, I assure you you may depend on me."

"Well! many thanks," said the woman, carelessly, "and when you're tired of holding him, you can let him run, he walks well enough, and I won't be gone, at the outside, more than half an hour," saying

which she disappeared down the companion stairs, leaving Too-too looking after her with very wide-open eyes, and a mouth which was suspiciously puckered, at the corners.

But Véronique would not let the baby cry ; she was as proud and pleased of being left in charge of him, as though she had been a child herself, and she walked up and down the deck, talking and cooing to him in her sweet low voice, and directing his attention to everything which she thought might prove attractive to his infant eyes, until Too-too's temporary dismay was quite allayed, and he reposed as complacently upon her arm, as though he had been used to be nursed by Sisters of Mercy in black gowns and starched white caps all the days of his life ; whilst Véronique surprised herself to find how much at home she seemed in the novel position which had been thrust upon her.

“ Look ! dear baby ! ” she exclaimed, as she gazed intently in the deep blue eyes, from which she seemed scarcely able to re-



move her own, "look, Too-too, at the pretty beads! look at the bright black beads! Shall Marie roll them on the deck for baby? Shall Marie throw the beads upon the deck? will Too-too run and catch them?" and as she spoke she trailed her rosary along the ground, and the child clapped his little hands, and tottered in its shining wake.

"Whose child is that, Marie?" said David, who passed her whilst she was thus employed.

"I don't know!" she answered, lifting a brighter face to his than he had seen her wear for many a long day past. "I don't even know his name, excepting that his nurse calls him Too-too; but she left him with me for a little while, and he is such a dear little fellow. Don't you think him very pretty, David?"

"I have hardly looked at him," replied the native, "but won't he tire you? Don't let these nurses put their proper work on you, they are all too apt to shirk it when they can."



“ Oh ! no ! indeed he doesn't tire me ; I like to have him ! ” was the earnest reply, “ I like to watch his pretty little ways, and hear his broken words ; besides, she won't be long, David, she will be back before I am ready to give up the baby. ”

“ Very well ! only don't fatigue yourself, remember you are not strong, ” he answered, and then passed on to the other side of the vessel, leaving Sœur Marie with a smile upon her lip.

“ He cannot understand the feeling, ” she said to herself, with that sort of superiority which women in these matters are conscious of possessing over men, “ how should he ? It is only a woman who can guess the pleasure which a woman feels in waiting on and caring for a little child, ” and with that the smile died away, to be replaced by an expression of such gravity, that Too-too nearly whimpered as he looked into her face, and found that for once his new attendant had forgotten to sympathise with him.

“ How I should like to make him love me, ” thought Véronique, as having again

bent her attention towards amusing the baby, she watched the smiles which dimpled on his rosy cheeks. "I wish I could be with this little darling long enough to let him know me from amongst all others, and run to me the first. Yet what would be the use of it," she continued, with another sigh, "we shall so soon be separated, and going on our different ways, it would be only laying up a fresh parting for myself in the future! But I shall never forget you, baby, though I have seen you for so short a time, for I think you are the very dearest little boy I ever met."

She commenced again to exert herself for the benefit of the little child, and had succeeded so well, that Too-too was laughing loudly as she played bo-peep with him from behind a coil of rope, when she suddenly heard a deep voice exclaim, "Baby!" and glancing quickly from her place of concealment, saw the child turn away from the bench near which their game had been carried on, and with the exclamation of "Papa!" toddle from her side into the

extended arms of a gentleman, who, with his eyes riveted upon his little son, was advancing through the crowd to meet him.

Kneeling as she was, and almost out of sight, Véronique looked up with eager curiosity, to see the father of the infant for whom she had conceived so deep an interest, and felt her breath abate, and her sight grow dim, as her eyes fell upon the form of Gordon Romilly! Yes! Gordon Romilly!—grown older, thinner, and in every respect less good-looking than when she had seen him last; but still Gordon Romilly—unmistakably her lover and her husband, whom Véronique had thought never to meet again!

For a moment the shock and the surprise were so great, that she felt as though she must yield to their influence; and, sinking downwards where she knelt, let her senses or her life take their flight as they would; but with the next, all the fear that possessed her was the fear of being recognised, and before she had realised

what she was about to do, she had sprung to her feet, and abandoning Too-too to his destiny, dashed down to the shelter of her own cabin, and thrown herself, trembling with agitation, upon the narrow couch she called her bed. She had scarcely accomplished this feat before she remembered that she had left the little child who had been committed to her care, and that her duty was to return, and see that he came to no harm; but when, obedient to the call, she attempted to retrace her steps, she found that all power of volition had been taken from her, and the most she could accomplish was to feebly call to one of the other Sisters of Mercy, and entreat her to go and see that the child was safely restored to his nurse, and that she was informed that Sœur Marie had been suddenly taken ill, and compelled to relinquish the charge she had committed to her.

“Why! what’s the matter with you?” demanded Sœur Thérèse, to whom she had addressed herself; “you seemed well



enough on deck just now ; do you want the doctor ? shall I send him to you ?”

“No, no !” exclaimed Marie impatiently, as she turned upon her berth, so as to conceal her countenance from her companion. “I wish for nothing but to be left in quiet. Leave me, Thérèse, I implore you, and tell no one but the nurse about my illness. It is a sudden vertigo, which will pass perhaps as quickly as it came. I know the pain of old—it is not in the doctor’s power to do me any good.”

Yes ! she had known the pain of old, but had she ever felt it in the same intensity as now ? Left once more to her own thoughts, to the task of attempting to make herself believe that she had been again thrown in the path of her recreant lover, and that every day and every hour until they arrived at their journey’s end she would be liable to be recognised and spoken to by him, Véronique found herself incapable of doing more than lie and tremble at the truth which she could not deny. And yet, now that it had occurred, it did not

seem strange to her that it should be so. An hour before she had believed that she was parted for ever from Gordon Romilly ; that first by his own act, and secondly by hers, a gulf had been placed between them which in this world could never again be crossed, and that she should see him and speak to him was the most unlikely of all unlikely things to happen. And yet, now, to think that she had been caressing and tending his child—that she was in the same ship with his wife and himself was an overpowering, a stunning thought, it is true, but still not such an unnatural one.

Does anything in this world appear unnatural after it has once happened ? The friend whom we have known as such for months, perhaps for years, and never dreamt of in another light, tells us to-day that we are nearer to him than we thought, and that the feeling with which he regards us is of no modern growth, but has been ours almost since he can remember us. Does it appear unnatural that it should be so ? Yesterday we should have smiled at

the idea, if presented by a less authority ; to-day we look back on the dead weeks and months, now numbered with the past, and know that we have been, not blind exactly, but walking with our eyes closed, and call ourselves (perhaps through tears of happiness) all kinds of hard names for having been so dull and senseless as to miss through our stupidity so much of what life's chalice holds so little.

Or, we have stumbled through the world, bearing a small pain here, and mastering a temporary weakness there, and never taking the trouble to think but what we shall be strong and well again at some future time, though how or when we have not stayed to consider ; until the day arrives when a physician gravely tells us that our disease is mortal, that our years are numbered, and that it is his duty to inform us that we shall not live to see another born. When the first shock, the disappointment may be, is over, does it seem unnatural it should be so ? Yesterday we imagined we should live to a green old age ; to-day we know



that a few weeks will see us laid in the grave ; and had we not wilfully kept our eyes shut, should we not have guessed it long ago ? Can we not look back over the past years during which we have lived so carelessly, and plainly trace the symptoms of that which is now coming to pass ? and are we not more surprised to think that we so easily mistook them, than that Death is advancing on us, like an armed man ?

No ! nothing in this world is so unnatural as that we should think nature so ; and Véronique had not been by herself for many minutes before she had recovered her surprise at meeting Gordon Romilly again, and was occupied in considering what course of action she had best pursue to prevent his discovering her presence on board the “Sultana.” For though she had mastered the surprise, the shock and the unhappiness were still the same ; and as the girl lay on her berth, remembering that he was not alone, that his wife and child accompanied him, jealousy, that acutest of all bitter earthly pangs, racked her tender bosom



with pains worthy of hell, until she had no power left to do more than lie, face downward, moaning quietly to herself, whilst she longed that it were not wicked to pray that the sea might open her jaws and swallow them all up together, before another opportunity was afforded her of witnessing either his happiness or his remorse. She had been so sure—so very sure—that she should never see him again; she had striven so hard to banish the memory of his love from her rebellious heart; she had made so certain that the performance of her duty would bring her greater satisfaction than the indulgence of her passion ever had done, that it was hard—so Véronique moaned to herself—hard that he should have been thrown across her way, just as she had schooled herself to enter contentedly on her new sphere of action, to be the means of reviving all her worst feelings and most earthly desires! How she wished, poor child! in that moment, that she had been less energetic in the pursuance of what she considered to be right; that she had

been contented to remain, as her friends had wished her to do, safely sheltered in the bosom of Rêve, and to abjure for ever that world into which it seemed as though it were impossible for her to step without encountering snares laid ready to entangle her feet.

For more than an hour had she remained thus, exhausting herself with fears and conjectures of what might come to pass, when she was startled from her reverie by hearing the voice of David, who had missed her from the breakfast-table, close at her ear.

“*Ma sœur*,” he exclaimed, “what is the matter with you—have you a head-ache? I am afraid you have over-tired yourself running about with that child! I knew how it would be when I saw you with him. You never will remember that you are anything but strong, and that a very little exertion knocks you up.”

“That’s strange, though, David, isn’t it, at nineteen years of age?” she said, as she raised herself on her elbow, and regarded him with a haggard smile upon her thin face.

“ I don't know about its being strange,” he answered, moodily, for the decline in Véronique's health during the past two years had been patent to all who knew her, “ but I know that it's true, and that you must take more care of yourself, or—”

“ Or I shan't last long enough to make it worth while for the Mission to have sent me out,” she replied with forced gaiety, for her object was to deceive him ; and then seeing that he looked grieved (for who could help regretting her), she added, “ Don't be vexed, dear David, it is wrong of me to joke on such a subject, but you know that it is only joking on my part—I have a head-ache, *mon frère* ; I acknowledge it, but I do not think that it proceeds from fatigue, and I trust that it may soon pass over.”

She lay down again upon her pillow, as she spoke, and he took her hand in his, and perched himself upon the edge of the berth.

“ Marie ! I have something to tell you !”

She guessed at once what news was



coming for her, but she turned her face from him, and answered—

“ Well, *mon frère*, what is it ?”

“ I find that a friend—or rather, I should say, an old acquaintance, of yours, came on board yesterday amongst the passengers of the ‘ Arabia.’ Can you guess who it is ?”

“ There is no need of guessing,” she answered, quietly, “ I have already seen him David ; it is Captain Romilly.”

The tranquillity of her speech and manner deceived him. David had had his suspicions, as has been said before, with respect to Gordon Romilly and Véronique, but they had never been confirmed, and it was now so long a time since she had seen him, or alluded to him, that the native had come to consider it as a girlish folly on her part, now past and done with, and for aught he knew to the contrary, forgotten.

Still, he had a little curiosity to see how she would receive the news of the actual presence of the handsome Englishman on board the ‘ Sultana,’ and was much relieved



to find it had so little power to affect her.

“You have seen him, have you? Did he speak to you?”

“Oh, no! nor I to him; and, David, if you would do me a kindness, you will try as much as possible to avoid a recognition between us. You must remember,” she added, speaking rather hurriedly and incoherently, “that when we met last it was under very different circumstances, and I doubt whether Captain Romilly himself would care to remember them; he was a bachelor then, free to know and associate with whom he chose, and now he is a married man—and—it is altogether so different—Oh, David! do promise me to keep out of his way, and if possible not to let him know that I am on board—I don’t wish either to meet him or to speak to him.”

“And I am sure I don’t,” replied David, who was delighted at her decision, “I never liked him much, Marie, as you know, and I am glad you wish to avoid him; but

will he not be sure to recognise you the first time you meet on deck ?”

“ I think not ; I hope not !” she answered, in a low voice, “ not in this dress and cap ; besides, I am changed, David—oh ! I am greatly changed since that happy time when Père Joseph was alive, and we all lived together on the Neilgherry Hills ;” and overcome by the recollections evoked by her allusion, Véronique turned on her pillow, and wept.

“ Do not let such thoughts trouble you, *ma sœur*,” said David, as he gently patted her shoulder, (ah, how different was that touch from the passionate grasp of former days !) “ depend on it, a peaceful future is in store for both of us. Meanwhile, we will do all we can to avoid encountering Captain Romilly or his wife, though as they are bound for Macao, I am afraid we shall have them for fellow-passengers to our journey’s end. But I cannot have you desert the deck on their account, Marie, for the fresh air is necessary for you, and you will droop without it.”

She promised him that she would do exactly as he thought best for her, but she pleaded for a few hours' repose during the heat of the day, so that it was not until the cool evening breezes had set in that she found herself once more seated on the bench which she had so summarily quitted in the morning.

She had not been settled there for more than five minutes before she heard Too-too's shout of recognition, and found herself attacked by his nurse, on the subject of her late behaviour with regard to him.

“A nice body you are to leave in charge of a child,” she commenced, though only in mock reproach, “why, he might have gone through one of the port-holes for anything you cared about him! You got me into a proper scrape, too, with the master, I can tell you, for having left him with such a careless person, and I suppose I shall never be allowed now to put the brat out of my arms, so long as we remain on board ship. I'm downright angry with you, that I am, and after you had promised me so faithfully

that you wouldn't leave him for a minute. I'm sure her ladyship's been a going on at me all day about it, in such a manner that I'm just sick of my life."

"Oh! I am so sorry, nurse!" exclaimed Véronique, with genuine concern, "but I did feel so ill! And his papa was there, wasn't he? is not that tall gentleman, with a fair beard, his papa? If he had not taken the baby, I would not have left him."

"Of course it was his papa," returned the nurse, with emphasis, "but Lor! that makes no manner of difference with unreasonable people like these here; every one's to be at their beck and call, and they looks upon servants as if they were beasts of burthen—I'm pretty near tired of it!"

"But I should not have left him," argued Véronique, self-reproachfully, "and particularly when I had promised—it was very wrong of me, and I'm afraid, nurse, that you'll never trust him to me again—but I wouldn't have done it if there had been any chance of his coming to harm."

"In course not," replied the nurse,



“least said soonest mended. And how’s your head, my dear? I heard ’twas awful bad, and I’m sure you look white enough, even now.”

“It’s better, thank you,” said Véronique, faintly. “Was the gentleman—the baby’s papa—very angry, nurse?”

“La! no! what makes you think anything more about it—it was Lady Rose as went on the most. The Captain would be well enough if she was out of the way, he’s a pleasant-looking gentleman—did you see him this morning?”

“I just saw him,” replied Véronique.

“He’s a fine man, ain’t he? but he’s gone off terrible in his looks during the last twelvemonths. I’ve heard tell he’s only seven-and-twenty, but he’s more like seven-and-thirty to my mind. You haven’t seen her ladyship yet, have you?”

“No!” was the answer, delivered in a very low voice.

“Well, there she sits, just the other side of the paddle-boxes: she’s mostly considered to be very handsome by gentlemen.

And there's the Captain himself taken a seat beside her. He looks so weary, don't he, for a young man? Call papa, Too-too! clap hands, and call papa!" and while the nurse was busy, directing the attention of the child towards his father, the Sister of Mercy slipped away again, downstairs, and remained to her comfort undiscovered during the rest of the evening.

It was a hard task she had set herself—to live, as it were, in the daily presence of the man, whom, to her sorrow, she still loved, without making herself known to him, but it was not actually so difficult a one as would be perhaps imagined.

The first and second-class passengers on board a steamer or sailing vessel are kept so separate, that they frequently arrive at the end of the voyage without having become acquainted with each other's names or personal appearance; for though the former are privileged to roam the ship as they will, they seldom choose to mix amongst the occupants of the steerage, whilst the latter are not permitted to put their feet

upon the quarter-deck, or, in other words, to pass the capstan. Consequently, with the exception of gentlemen, who go there to smoke with the ship's officers, or nursemaids to gossip with their kind, few of the favoured company belonging to the saloon ever tread these planks which terminate in the fore-castle and the galley, and if they do so, it is easy for the rightful owners to avoid them.

And so it came to pass that the "Sultana" had reached Ceylon, and handed over her passengers for China to the care of Captain Henry, of the steamer "Samos," (well known as one of the best boats which the Company had ever put on the service of those seas) before Véronique came in personal contact with the man who had deserted her.

## CHAPTER X.

### FORGIVEN AND—FORGOTTEN!

BUT though Véronique continued to elude the notice of Captain Romilly and his wife, it was not so easy to repulse the attentions of Too-too, or of Too-too's nurse.

Lady Rose appeared to take very little notice of, or interest in, her child. If she ever caressed or nursed him, it was but for a few minutes at a time, at the close of which brief period, he was invariably handed over to his father, or back to his attendant, with the remark that he grew heavier every day, and would soon be too big to be lifted or carried about at all.

After which, perhaps Gordon Romilly would hold the boy for a little while, pacing



the deck with him, and smiling to hear the compliments with which his fellow passengers were so lavish, on the subject of the blue eyes, and the golden curls, and the unmistakable likeness the child bore to himself; but nursing is not a man's forte, and it was never long before Too-too found himself again in the arms of his nurse, and being conveyed in the direction of the after-deck. And, as soon as the little feet were set in motion on their own account, an infantine cry would be raised for "Marie," and the little white frock with its short skirts, come fluttering in her direction, until the flaxen head was laid against her bosom, and the rosy fingers were busy with her beads and crucifix.

For Too-too, although he had no lack of playthings of his own, was like many an older person in this world, and thought, because Sœur Marie's rosary had never been intended to minister to a baby's pleasure, that it was, for that very reason, the most delightful toy that had ever been invented, and turned with the greatest in-

difference from woolly lambs, and barking dogs, and painted harlequins, to amuse himself with the string of black beads, and the roughly carved wooden cross, which depended from the slender waist of his new friend.

And Véronique had not the courage to rebuff this baby friendship. Too-too's nurse had made several acquaintances amongst the steerage passengers beside herself, and notwithstanding her former defalcation, was always but too ready to leave the child in the care of the Sister of Mercy, whilst she pursued her flirtations, or carried on her gossip amongst the crowd; and though Véronique, from fear of its bringing her in contact with the parents, did not encourage the practice, she had not the heart altogether to refuse the charge. She had not the heart to turn away from the dewy lips which Gordon Romilly's little child presented to her, night and morning; she had not the moral courage to appear cold or indifferent, when Too-too singled her out from the rest of the men and

women by whom she was surrounded, and prattling in his baby language of all that interested him, sought the shelter of her knee, and was content to stay there. She knew that it was weakness to feel so pleased, when the boy turned his big eyes upon her own, and gravely delivered the information that he loved her : she called herself a fool, because the clasp of his tiny fingers made her tremble, and she felt as though, if she might but take him in her arms, and carry him away to some desert place, where no one should find them again and he would be her own for ever more, she should be content.

It was utter weakness to purchase an hour's intercourse with Gordon Romilly's child, at the cost of a flood of bitter tears—it was folly to feel so happy under his caresses, and his broken words of love, and then to lie awake all night, and think how different her life might have been, had the Almighty granted her a similar blessing—and yet, for the time being, Véronique lived feverishly on the folly, and the weak-

ness, and scarcely dared to think how she should feel when they were both removed from her.

Meanwhile, she never actually came face to face with Gordon Romilly. Several times had he paced the after-deck whilst she was on it, making her tremble with each step he took, and once, when she had Too-too on her lap, he stopped beside them, holding out his arms to the child, and calling him by name, before she was aware that he was present.

She nearly betrayed herself on that occasion, for the low hurried cry which escaped her, as she turned her face towards the sea, evidently attracted his attention, and when he had lifted the boy from her embrace, he remained in the same position for several minutes, gazing earnestly at the back of her slight figure, and still more so at the hand, with which she had grasped the side of the bench she occupied. The nurse, who luckily for herself, happened to be in close attendance at the time, noticed the attraction which Véronique's hand



appeared to have for her master, and, after his departure, commented on it.

“La! my dear! whatever made you turn away from the Captain in that manner? I’m sure he wanted to have a good look at your face! He seemed quite taken by your hand! Well! ’tis whitesome, though rather too thin, to my liking; but it don’t look as though it had seen much hard work—I should have had a pretty hand myself,” displaying a specimen, which was as broad as it was long, “if it hadn’t been for that—but la! service will spoil the best of hands, as it do the best of tempers! And there they are actually calling for me to take that child again. It isn’t worth the trouble of their carrying him away, if it’s only to make me tramp after him in five minutes’ time,” and off she went, grumbling to retake her charge, whilst Véronique trembling in every limb, still leant over the side of the steamer, thinking that another such *rencontre* must kill her; whilst Captain Romilly, in much the same mood, lolled at the other end,

wishing—wishing—he hardly knew what, but anything rather than he were himself, and memory had so much power to torture him!

As may be supposed, David did not fail to notice this predilection of Véronique for the Romillys' child, and to comment upon it.

“If you wish to avoid coming in contact with the father,” he said to her one day while speaking on the subject, “why on earth do you take the trouble to carry about and amuse the child. He has a nurse to do all that for him, and you are not so strong as to have any superfluous strength to waste on other people's business. I am surprised at you, *ma sœur!*”

“Are you?” she answered uneasily. “I am surprised at myself sometimes, David, but the baby has taken a fancy to me, and I have not the heart to repulse it!”

“Well! it will end in Captain Romilly's speaking to you, see if it does not. I have noticed several times lately that he has stopped and played with the child, whilst you have been sitting close by.”

“That is because the nurse will always take a seat by me. I turn my face towards the sea, David, and who could see my features beneath this enormous cap?” and with a sigh of distaste, Véronique gave a twitch to the unbecoming head-dress which she wore.

“You must be careful however, or he will recognise you, without seeing your features.”

“I think not. I doubt if he even remembers my existence. But I cannot cease to notice the baby, David! It loves me—and it is such a dear little thing—and—”

“Why, Marie! are you crying? What have I said to cause these tears?”

She struggled for a moment with her emotion, and then, in a broken voice, continued:

“Don’t think me wicked, David, or ungrateful, but it is hard sometimes to look on little children, and to remember—to remember—at least I as a woman think so, but perhaps it is only because I am so

weak—that I shall never—never—have a baby of my own.”

He was silent, and thinking she had vexed him by displaying so little energy for the life she had voluntarily undertaken, Véronique put forth her hand, and laid it on his own.

“Don’t be angry with me, *mon frère*, or despise me. I am but a woman, remember, and these are but passing thoughts—prayer soon disperses them, and I doubt if I would change my lot now, if I could!”

“I do not despise you, Véronique,” he answered huskily, and even in that moment she could not avoid remarking that he called her by her old name. “I, too, am often obliged to have recourse to prayer, for the same reason, but when such thoughts assail you, *ma sœur*, do not forget that you have had the grace given you to embrace a profession by which every creature in this world, who is ignorant of the blessed truths of salvation, becomes your special charge—a child to be looked after, and instructed, and saved. As an earthly parent, your



influence would probably have been confined to a very small circle—in your present position, its extension is unlimited. You must console yourself with that idea,” and striving to smile at the comfort which he felt himself to be but chilly, David left her side, and made no further objections to her intimacy with the little Romilly.

But when the change spoken of in the last chapter had been effected, when the “Sultana” took her course from Ceylon to Madras, and the passengers for China were transferred to the “Samos,” to be carried in the opposite direction, it was not so easy a matter for the second-class to keep clear of the first-class as it had been, theretofore. The steamer being a much smaller one, the decks were consequently closer to each other, and the passengers, having been reduced from a couple of hundred to forty or fifty, had many more opportunities of examining each other’s faces. Still Véronique and David managed to keep to their side of the vessel; and as they expected to reach their journey’s end in the course of another

fortnight, hoped to remain unnoticed by the Romillys until it should be accomplished, and had it depended on themselves they probably would have done so, but Fate, and the perverse obstinacy of a dumb animal, ordained that an encounter between them should take place sooner than was otherwise intended.

In order to explain the latter sentence, it will be necessary to go back so far as to say that amongst other live stock which the "Samos" shipped at Point de Galle were a couple of very fine horses, destined to be carried to Hong Kong ; and which, as the space in the hold was small and confined, and it was thought that the animals (which are liable to sea-sickness) would suffer less in the open air, had been placed in horse-boxes between the after and the quarter-deck. But one of them had conceived a great fright on being conveyed on board, a fright which it did not seem capable of overcoming, and although its box was well-padded and comfortable, it continued to strike out with its heels, right

and left, by night and by day, until it had nearly exhausted itself, and was considered by most of the gentlemen passengers to be in a very dangerous condition.

Captain Henry was much concerned about the animal, as it was a valuable one which he was taking to Hong Kong as a favour for a personal friend, and he could not imagine what he should say to its owner if he arrived in port with the intelligence that the poor horse had been thrown overboard half way. He was in consequence never tired of consulting with the gentlemen as to the best means of quieting the restive brute; and when every possible remedy had been tried without effect, and the animal, having nearly kicked itself to death, was lying almost motionless against the side of its box, they decided in council upon taking him out of his close quarters, and lowering him into the hold, to see whether solitude and darkness combined might not produce a change for the better.

It was late one evening that this proposal was first made, and no sooner had it



been started and agreed upon, than Captain Henry determined that it should at once be put into execution.

The nights were now unpleasantly warm when spent below, and no one thought of leaving the deck until they were absolutely obliged to do so. Véronique, who had been sitting by herself for several hours, busied herself with her own thoughts, and not even taking notice of the whereabouts of little Too-too and his nurse, heard Captain Henry and his passengers debating together about the animal, but hardly realised what they were going to do with him, until several men appeared with lanterns, and a small crowd assembled round the box, and it seemed but the next moment that she heard a great commotion and scuffling of horses' feet, and looking up, saw the animal, which was a powerful Australian, plunging about the after-deck. It had remained so quiet for so many days, and was apparently so exhausted by the exertions it had made, that Captain Henry and his friends had miscalculated the crea-



ture's strength, and thought it would have passively allowed itself to be lowered into the hold, instead of which, as soon as it was free of the bars by which it had been confined, it seemed as though the sense of liberty had driven it wild, and although two men immediately grasped the halter they experienced the greatest difficulty in maintaining their hold upon its head. The shouting of the seamen, the flash of the lanterns in its eyes, and the exclamations of the gentlemen as they begged the passengers to keep out of its way, seemed to madden the horse more and more, and in another moment it was backing towards an open port, and threatening to drag those who held it (and one of whom was Gordon Romilly) over-board.

“Close the port—close the port!” shouted Captain Henry, and the man who rushed to execute the order came so suddenly upon the animal, that with a tremendous rear and a snort of defiance it dashed to the other side of the deck.

Then it was that Véronique, who, natu-

rally timid where others were concerned, was terrified for Gordon Romilly's sake at what was going on, and had risen from her seat as she tremblingly surveyed the scene before her, saw, to her horror, a little white-frocked figure, delighted with the noise, and quite unconscious of the danger, come toddling from the quarter-deck, unheeded by either nurse or mother, and step right into the path of the infuriated, and almost unmanageable horse.

With a cry, which had no thought of self in it, with a promptitude and energy, and determination to succeed which would in like manner have taken her overboard to save *his* child, Véronique dashed forward to interpose herself between Too-too and what seemed certain death for him, and reached the unconscious infant just in time to shield his tiny person from a blow from the horse's hoof, which laid her prostrate and senseless on the deck.

“Get out of the way, can't you?” exclaimed Captain Henry angrily as he first saw the accident occur. “Good Heavens!

she has been knocked over—a woman, of course—didn't we warn them all to keep to the other side of the ship?"

"Stand back!" cried Gordon Romilly, in a voice of deep excitement, as the crowd pressed about him, but so authoritatively that they instinctively retreated again; "do you not see that she has saved my child? Take the horse! throw him overboard—do what you like with him—I must attend to this woman. She has risked her life for me," and, delivering the halter into the hands of a bystander, and directing another to bear his child, he lifted the lifeless form of the Sister of Mercy in his arms, and carried her on to the quarter-deck.

All then was, of necessity, bustle and confusion. The nurse came hurrying back from where she had been gossiping with her friends, declaring that she had only left the blessed child a moment before, and that she thought of course that he would have been safe "along of his ma;" Lady Rose, weeping with fright and excitement, insisted that the woman had quitted her

side without saying a word about the baby, and she naturally imagined that she had taken him with her ; whilst David, hearing what had happened, appeared with glowing eyes to jealously snatch the senseless form of Sœur Marie from the hold of Gordon Romilly ; and the ship's doctor ran up and down the companion-ladder with sal volatile and smelling-salts, and talked about concussion of the brain and opening a vein if the patient did not recover her consciousness during the next ten minutes. Meantime, the poor horse, who had been the most active agent in the misfortune, and who appeared to have been completely sobered, as animals and children often are, by the sudden hush which fell upon the shouting crowd by which erst-while he had been surrounded, had stood quite quiet after injuring Véronique, and permitted the seamen to lower him into the hold without further opposition.

And Gordon Romilly, who had seen and recognised (with what feelings were best known to himself, for he gave no utterance



to them) the features of the Sister of Mercy who had imperilled her life for that of his child, before David appeared to claim his right to succour and look after her—had retreated to the further end of the quarter-deck, and apparently oblivious either of the complaints of his wife, or the speculations of his friends, was leaning in moody abstraction over the side of the vessel, communing with his own heart!

Happy are those who can commune with their own hearts and “be still;” who can search to their inmost depths, and whatever wounds they probe in doing so, say with truth that they have never been the means of inflicting such upon the hearts of those who loved them; that they have never offered stones for bread, nor given serpents in exchange for fish! For if so, they are happy—happier than they think for—even though their best affections have been outraged, and their torn souls drip with blood.

Could Gordon Romilly have only said so in that hour of communing with his dis-

honoured self, he would have been thankful to exchange the knowledge for a cold death beneath the waters upon which he gazed.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Véronique, revived by the attentions of the doctor and the care of David, felt once more strong enough to think, she had not the slightest consciousness of what had happened to her. She could not imagine why she should be laid upon her narrow berth, with a fellow-passenger sitting by her pillow, and enjoying silence as a stern necessity, nor why her head was bandaged and ached so badly as to make compliance easy to her. But after a few hours' rest, David, who could not sleep whilst she was ill (and there were others waking in the ship that night), entered her cabin, and in answer to her numerous enquiries, explained to her by what means her accident had been brought about; in the course of which narration he naturally used the name of Gordon Romilly, and

told her that he had both recognised and spoken to him.

But neither by word nor sign did Véronique betray what effect this intelligence had upon her. She merely turned her face away from the inspection of her adopted brother whilst he told his story, and if she blushed or trembled at it, her pillow and the cabin wall were the only recipients of her agitation.

David was, of course, aware that the service she had rendered to the Romillys must necessarily lead to some communication between them, but he entreated her not to feel any annoyance at the prospect, as a few words of thanks would probably be all that would be considered necessary, and if she desired no further intercourse, it would be very easy to make her wishes known to them through him.

In a low voice, which yet was free from any traces of emotion, Véronique begged him not to think of her. She was quite equal, she averred, to receive the thanks of either Captain or Lady Rose Romilly, if

they should think that thanks were necessary for what she had done ; and at the most, another week or ten days would see them separated, probably for life. She had no such feelings against them as David seemed to imagine ; she was thankful to know she had been the means of saving their little child from what might have proved his death—from what would certainly have proved his death, so David answered, for the doctor had asseverated that such a blow as she had received must inevitably have killed an infant on the spot—well, then ! she was all the more thankful that she had been in time—and—oh ! dear ! her head ached terribly—she could hardly think or speak. So David left her to repose—and she took it in a new fashion—sitting bolt upright in her berth until the morning dawned, and staring out of the open port upon the deep-blue waters, rushing so noiselessly beneath the vessel's prow, whilst she trembled to think what she should say to *him*, when they came face to face.



The blow upon her head which had inflicted a scalp wound, had made her feverish, to which the sleepless night contributed in no small degree, so that when the doctor visited her in the morning, she was glad to hear that he considered it necessary that she should lie in bed all day. The longer she could put off the interview which she so dreaded, and felt to be inevitable, the more strength she hoped to gather, with which to cope with it. But seclusion to her berth was not to save her from what was, perhaps, the most trying part of the ordeal she had to go through, for she had scarcely drained the cup of tea which the woman who attended to her wants had brought her from the steerage breakfast, when she heard the voice of Too-too, and of Too-too's nurse advancing in the direction of her cabin, and accompanied, to her horror, by another which she recognised as that of Lady Rose.

“What a horrid place!” it was exclaiming. “I had no idea the steerage was so dark and dirty. You really mustn't bring

Master Too-too here any more, Lawson! I never would have let him go with you if I had known he played about on decks like these."

As she heard these words Véronique started up in her berth, breathing hard and fast, and scarcely believing it possible that the visit could be intended for herself, but the next moment her doubts were at an end, for Lawson, the nurse, with Too-too hanging over her shoulder, popped her head in at the cabin door, and exclaiming—

"This is the way, my lady, this is the young person who saved Master Too-too," ushered Lady Rose Romilly to the very bedside of the startled girl, whose agitation could not but be patent to both her visitors.

"La! you've no call to look so frightened, Sister Mary," said the nurse with a good-natured attempt to set Véronique at her ease, "here's Master Too-too come to thank you for what you've done for him, to say nothing of my lady herself. There

ain't a chair here, my lady, these cabins are so small, but—”

“Oh! never mind, Lawson! I can stand,” replied her mistress, “I shall only be here a few minutes. Well, my poor young woman, how are you this morning?”

“Better, thank you!” muttered Véronique whose first impulse had been to order Lady Rose out of her cabin, and say she never wished to see or speak with her again.

“Are you in pain?”

“Not much; nothing to signify,” replied the girl, who had unceremoniously turned her face away from her distinguished visitor.

“Well!” said Lady Rose, who felt uncomfortable at her reception, she hardly knew why, “of course Captain Romilly and myself are very sorry to think you should have suffered so much in saving our little son from being hurt, and we should like to know that you are well attended to, and have everything comfortable about you. Is there anything you want?”

“Nothing, Madame,” replied Véronique, who could not see Lawson’s warning gesture to call the lady by her proper title.

“Nothing to eat or drink that our interest could procure for you, nothing, in short, that would make you more easy? You must be aware that you have rendered us a great service, that Captain Romilly occupies a high position in the world, and that this child is his son and heir; there is nothing you could have done that would make him—or indeed myself—feel more obliged to you.”

Lady Rose Romilly spoke feelingly, for careless mother as she was when all went right with Too-too, she would have been less than woman could she have contemplated his late escape with indifference, but Véronique, try as she would, could not respond to her advances. She closed her eyes and turned her head away; she felt as though it were impossible to look on her bright presence, or to inhale the odour which diffused itself from her scented, silk-



clad person, without blurting out the rough truth, that she had robbed her of what no tenders of kindness or of help could ever restore. The allusions which Lady Rose made to her husband, and their mutual interest in the child, had grated on the feelings of the wretched girl before her, until she was almost writhing beneath the torture of her jealousy, and the sense of the impossibility of her ever gaining relief from it.

The last question which had been put to her received no reply at all, until Lawson, annoyed at such discourteous behaviour on the part of one whom she had acknowledged as an acquaintance, took her roughly to task in demanding an explanation of it.

“Why don’t you answer my lady, Sister Mary?” she said, snappishly, “you can’t be that bad that you’re unable to speak. Don’t you hear her asking you if there’s anything as she can do for you?”

“But there’s nothing—nothing,” replied Véronique, in a voice of pain, as she turned

restlessly upon her pillow. "I want nothing, except to be left alone."

"Well! there's manners, if ever I see 'em," exclaimed the nurse, in a tone of vexation, "I wouldn't trouble myself about her any more, my lady, if I were you. I'm sure I can't tell what's come to Sister Mary to-day, she ain't a bit like herself."

"Hush, Lawson!" said Lady Rose, with every intention of being good-natured, "I daresay her head aches, and she does not feel inclined to talk, and I have something for her here which will do her much more good than words. My good girl, I won't stay to worry you any longer to-day, but I hope we shall soon see you on deck again, and meanwhile, as I know that money is always more useful than any other present in a strange country, you must accept this from Captain Romilly and myself as a slight token of what we feel you have done for us;" and as she concluded, Lady Rose thrust a bank note for ten pounds between the closed fingers of Véronique's passive hand, and prepared to leave the cabin.

But in an instant her footsteps were arrested ; in an instant both women, the mistress and the maid, had turned with amazement to see the little Sister of Mercy spring into a sitting posture on her bed, and having first scornfully regarded the money which had been put into her hand, confront them with flushed cheeks and blazing eyes.

“ Did *he* tell you to give me this ? ” she cried, as with knitted brows she stared enquiringly in Lady Rose’s face.

“ *He*—he—do you mean Captain Romilly ? ” demanded the lady, half fearfully. “ Oh dear no ! certainly not, he does not even know of it. It is a little present from myself, although I said that you must consider it from both of us. But doubtless Captain Romilly will do more for you on his own account—indeed I am sure he will—this is only from myself, a little gift to mark my appreciation of what you did for Too-too.”

“ Then be pleased to take back your gift, Madame,” said Véronique, haughtily, as she laid the bank note upon the hand of

Lady Rose, “and tell Captain Romilly from me that if he thinks I will take money—or any other benefit—from him, for the common service I have rendered to his—his child, he is very—very much—he is altogether mistaken,” and with this declaration Véronique buried her face in her pillow, and burst into a flood of tears.

“Come away, my lady! pray come away,” whispered Lawson, “and let us send the doctor to her, she is going out of her senses, she’s got the deliriums, I assure you she has, she may do us an injury if we stay here much longer.”

And Lady Rose, looking from the bank note returned upon her hands, to where the Sister of Mercy lay convulsively sobbing on her pillow, really thought that the nurse’s suggestion had reason in it, and beat a hasty retreat from the steerage to her proper quarters, where, having an instinctive idea that her husband would blame her for the haste with which she had acted, she kept her own counsel, and directed



Lawson to do the same with respect to the whole proceeding.

But this interview greatly retarded the recovery of Véronique. She had wept so much, and agitated herself so much over it, that when the doctor paid her his next visit, he found his patient in a high fever, and it was three or four days before she was again able to leave her berth ; and when she did, she evinced an unconquerable objection to go on deck. The light hurt her eyes, she said, and the noise confused her head, and she preferred to be left quite alone, sitting on a box outside her cabin door, where, with her slight figure supported against the wall, and her hands idly clasped upon her lap, she would remain for hours, occupied with her own thoughts, and apparently unmindful of anything which went on around her ; until one evening, when the deck was a mass of trampling feet, and the air resounded with noisy conversation, and everyone except herself appeared to be amused and happy, the doorway near which she sat was darkened by the figure

of a man, and languidly unclosing her eyes, Véronique started to see that she was once more in the presence of Gordon Romilly. It had come then, the interview she so much dreaded was at hand. A faint flush overspread her thin face, and shutting her eyes again, she leant her head (the dark hair on which had been cropped as short as that of a child) against the wall, almost hoping that his business might not lie with her. But the next moment she was undeceived.

“Véronique!” he said, in a voice which was low and full of feeling.

“Gor-don!” she answered, but so languidly, so apathetically, so differently from the tone in which she had once pronounced that name, that the sound of it excited nothing but a weary sense of pain both in the breast of him who heard and she who uttered it.

“May I speak to you, Véronique, may I say two words to you?”

“I am listening,” she answered, simply.

“I want to thank you,” he went on, hurriedly, “if it is possible to thank you

adequately, for what you did for my child. You saved his life for me, Véronique, and he is all I have—all I care for—all that is left me now !”

“ I am glad that I was there to do it,” she said, quietly, but a great pulse which leapt up and down in her throat, as she leant back against the wall, betrayed that her agitation was rising.

“ He loves you, Véronique, I knew that long before I knew that you were yourself, and you love him, do you not ? my poor little child !”

“ It would be strange if I did not love all children,” she answered, in a low voice, “ since I am childless.”

But at these words, spoken so calmly that they conveyed a double sense of desolation, Gordon Romilly’s self-control gave way.

“ Véronique ! Véronique !” he exclaimed, as he grasped her arm, “ do not speak like that, for God’s sake, or you will drive me mad. You have given me back my child, the only thing which I dare now say I

love, and I—I robbed you of—everything !”

“*Tout est pardonné : tout est oublié,*” she said slowly, though every limb was trembling beneath the effort of speaking to him.

“Is that really true ?” he demanded, “have you forgiven and forgotten it, Véronique ? I can never do either for myself. Each day seems to make the burthen heavier, and the remembrance of the sin more dark.”

“It happened a long time ago,” she answered faintly.

She could not trust herself to speak more openly. She knew that at the first discussion between them, of what had been, all her feigned apathy would break down at once.

“And you have recovered from it, you have learned to view me in my true light, Véronique, to see that I was neither worth possessing nor regretting ? Well !” with a deep sigh, “I suppose that it is best so, and that I ought to be very thankful for



the change. I, too, am changed, Véronique ; I have not forgotten ; or forgiven myself, but I am not the same man that I was upon the Neilgherry Hills.”

At which words she opened her eyes wide, and steadfastly regarding him, saw that lines were visible across his forehead, and that from his mouth ran two deep furrows which had not been there before. His look, too, had grown duller, and lost the self-conceit it bore of old, and there was the weary expression patent in his countenance, of which the nurse had once complained, and which seemed to sit but strangely upon one so young. And as she gazed, Véronique rose up from her seat, and stood before him, staggeringly.

“ Yes you are changed, Gordon, you are sadly, terribly changed, and so am I : we are not the same man and woman that knew each other in the time gone by. And because of that ; because we must be strangers, not only in appearance but in truth, I have one thing to ask of you, one

request to make in return for having stood between death and your child.”

“Oh, what is it, Véronique? speak, tell it me at once: if it were to the half of my fortune, it should be yours.”

“It is not so much as that,” she answered with a miserable smile. “It is, that during the few days that we must be together, you shall not speak to me again.”

“Not speak to you again? when you have done so much for me, and for—for—Lady Rose. Véronique, you cannot be in earnest.”

“It is because I have, as you are pleased to call it, done so much for you and Lady Rose, that I am in earnest, Gor-don. If you—if you ever cared for me, I entreat you in God’s name, to grant me my request.”

He hid his face for a moment in his hands, and then he rose to leave her.

“I have no more to say,” he uttered brokenly, “the sin was mine; would that the punishment might descend on me alone.

God keep you, Véronique, and if you have one prayer left for me, let it be that at some day before my death, He may remember me also."

He passed away from before her as he spoke, and she, watching all that had made life sunshine to her, disappear up those narrow stairs, threw herself once more upon her berth in anguish which was too deep for words or tears.

## CHAPTER XI.

### IN DANGER.

WHEN Gordon Romilly told Véronique that he was a changed man, he spoke no less than the whole truth. He was completely changed, and much more so in his mind than in his body. The two years of distaste which he had passed ; of distaste for his life, for himself, and for everything which concerned him, had opened his eyes to his true character, and the full extent of the sin which he had committed. For though he had known from the day of his marriage with Lady Rose, that he was acting in a dishonourable and cruel manner towards Véronique, he had hoped that time would soften the pain of separation both for her and himself, and had not fully



realised, until the interview which he had held with her at Brüssenburgh, how completely he had robbed her of what no length of time, nor penitence, nor after circumstances, could restore, or even atone for. When he had seen on that occasion the dumb suffering depicted on her upturned face, had heard the stifled cry of agony with which she received the news of her own ruin, and watched her silent apathy turn to scorn and proud defiance, Gordon Romilly felt for the first time what he had done. He had thought of her before that moment as a poor, deserted girl weeping quietly over her faded hopes, in her home amongst the hills, yet gradually deriving consolation from the simple duties and enjoyments by which she was surrounded : but he realised then, that where he had found the quiet happiness and contentment, with which it pleased him to flatter his imagination, he had left nothing but black ruin and desolation behind him ; and that the pure and simple country maiden, who could derive pleasure from her

flowers and her bees, had been changed through his agency, into a broken-hearted and indignant woman, who, whilst she acknowledged that she had been basely cheated by himself, out of all that made life dear to her, spurned his offers of assistance, and dared him to follow or to profess to hold a further interest in her.

And from that hour Gordon Romilly, who had been struggling ever since his marriage to regain his peace of mind, lost it entirely, and had never known a moment's pleasure since. For he could not think of Véronique but as he had seen her last, flying from him through the dark night, whither she would not say, and he felt he had no right to ask. Flying from him, perhaps into a pit of destruction which his treachery had opened for her unsuspecting feet, and by which, were she hurled down to hell, the guilt would lie at his door alone.

The idea of so horrible a contingency, added to the affection which he bore the girl, the reality of which had been made

painfully patent to him by meeting her again, had preyed upon his mind until he became a shadow of his former self, and more changed in disposition even, than in his outward appearance.

Nothing seemed to give him satisfaction, and even the birth of his child, which was the brightest event which had taken place in his existence during the last two years, had failed to do more than cause him a languid pleasure, for as he looked on Tootoo, and remembered that with his father's features the boy might have inherited the worst traits of his father's character, he would turn away with a shudder from the contemplation of so evil a destiny.

But though his repentance came too late to enable him to make any amends to the woman he had injured, it produced an effect upon himself which, in all probability, no prosperity would have had the power of doing.

To lead a quiet, moral life must be good for all, and for some, essentially necessary, but it is equally true, that there are cer-



tain characters amongst our fallen race, who, without they commit a great crime, which shall thoroughly rouse them to a sense of their own iniquity, would quietly sink down to hell, overweighted with self-satisfaction, and ignorance that they have done anything worthy of repentance.

Whether Gordon Romilly was one of these sinners or no, the first evil of which he was purged by being convinced of the baseness with which he had acted towards Véronique, was his self-conceit. It was impossible that conceit and such a conviction could dwell in the same heart together, and the effect of his newborn humility was to make him more lenient towards the faults of others, and especially those of his wife.

He had not led an unhappy life with Lady Rose, on the contrary, had there been no remorse and no rival affection in the case, they might have been said to have got on very comfortably together, for Gordon Romilly was too indifferent to her to take umbrage at trifles.

It is only men and women who love



each other very much indeed, who think it worth their while to make their lives mutually miserable, by suspicions of jealousy, and coldness, and slight, where none such were ever intended or desired.

Yet he had often pronounced her vain, and silly, and thoughtless, and let her see that it was the case, but with his lowered opinion of himself he became diffident of accusing a woman of faults which he felt he possessed, in a much higher degree.

And his forbearance with Lady Rose had extended to graver errors until it had become very noticeable, both to her family and his own. Indeed the fact of his being on board the "Samos" and on his way to take up an appointment, which from his former proclivities might have been supposed to be very distasteful to him, was only another proof of the gentle manliness with which he had learned to wield the sceptre of his marital authority.

So determined a flirt as Lady Rose Romilly had been before her marriage was not likely to make a very steady matron after-

wards, but her flirtations had never reached to such a height as to render her husband uneasy, until they had returned from the continent a year before, and taken up their residence in England ; at which period she had been thrown amongst all her old acquaintances and not a few of her old admirers.

Still Gordon Romilly had trusted her, thinking there was safety in numbers, and not believing it possible that she could ever contemplate bringing dishonour on her name or his own, until he found that the few admirers had dwindled down to one, and that that one was too often seen in public with his wife not to afford a handle for ill-natured gossip. And then he began to consider how he could best withdraw her from the influence of the man to whom she appeared to have taken such a fancy, without making it apparent to the world that he had thought it necessary to do so ; and having had the Resident-Councillorship of Macao offered him, half in jest, by an old friend, had accepted it, to the utter asto-

nishment of his family, who could not understand what motive should induce him to take an appointment of which he had no need, and return to a country which he was well known to detest.

But Gordon Romilly left them to their surmises, and kept his own counsel; he who but a few years back had scarcely hesitated to bring an innocent girl to dishonour, had learned to show consideration even to the folly of a half-guilty woman, and the secret of his becoming the Resident Councillor of Macao (the very thought of which filled him with disgust, so much did he dislike it) was kept even from the curiosity of Lady Rose, who found that all her complaints, though patiently listened to, were unable to shake the determination of her husband.

To find that Véronique Moore was on board the same ship with them, whilst it relieved his mind of a fearful doubt respecting her, added a fresh pang to the heart of Gordon Romilly. To know, that notwithstanding his misconduct, she had been



preserved in moral as well as physical safety, was a subject of deep thankfulness with him, yet he could not look on her frail form and her sweet, sad face, without recalling the blooming joyous girl, who had so trustingly delivered her happiness to his keeping, and remembering with a shudder that the ruin he saw before him had been effected by his own hands.

Yet he respected the request she had preferred to him; and after the brief conversation which they held in the steerage, he made no further effort to seek an interview with her. He explained this conduct to his wife by saying that he had spoken to the Sister of Mercy who had risked her life for Too-too, and that she not only refused to take any acknowledgment of the service she had rendered them, but desired that the subject even should not again be mentioned in her presence; and Lady Rose, remembering the abrupt manner in which her own offering had been returned to her, was quite ready to believe her husband's statement, and to promise to abide by his



wishes in the matter. And therefore a quiet salutation when they came in contact with each other was all the recognition that passed from that time forth, between the Romillys and Sœur Marie; although the affection of Too-too for his friend was unabated, and he spent much more of his time in her arms than in those of his proper attendant.

In this manner more than another week had passed over their heads, and the "Samos," having touched for a few hours both at Penang and Singapore, took her way into the treacherous Chinese seas, with every prospect of making a fair voyage to Hong-Kong.

One night, as Véronique, having lain awake for several hours, thinking over all that had happened to her during the last month, had dropped into a feverish, uneasy slumber, she was suddenly roused by the sound of—she knew not what; a harsh, grating sound, unlike anything she had heard on boardship before; but she had not been thoroughly conscious more than

two seconds before she became aware that the "Samos" was no longer moving—that she was stationary in the wide waters, and that there was a great confusion and noise of tongues on deck. But when she rose in her berth and looked out at the open port, she could see nothing but the glassy blue sea, flowing peacefully beneath the black walls of the steamer, nor hear anything beside the vociferous orders being issued above, and the calm, cool gurgle of the waves below, as they lapped against the side of the vessel.

Véronique was not in the least alarmed—there had been just such a stoppage the week before, when a shark had got entangled in the chains, and they had been obliged to lay-to until matters were put straight again—she only wished that sailors could go about their business without so much shouting, and she hoped Too-too would not be frightened at the noise, and with that she lay down again upon her pillow, and closed her weary eyes in sleep.

But she was not destined to slumber

long. The noise and confusion on deck increased instead of diminishing, and after a while several men with lanterns passed the open door of her cabin on their way to the hold, and from the stray words which Véronique (now thoroughly awake again) caught of their conversation, she was stimulated to ask them a question—

“Is anything wrong—is there any danger?” she called out from her berth.

“Danger! I should think there was,” replied one of the men, “we’re all going to the bottom together, young woman, as fast as ever we can, if you calls that danger.”

At this startling piece of intelligence Véronique’s heart began to beat very fast, and she experienced that natural alarm which any one would have done under the circumstances, but she did not lose her self-control, for the next moment she had slipped on her dress, and was standing at the head of the companion-ladder, looking anxiously about her.

There were several figures posted about the deck in various attitudes, many of



whom were leaning over the ship's side, in company with the captain, watching the movements of some officers who were busy in a boat below ; but otherwise the steamer looked much the same as usual ; the first confusion seemed to have subsided—no particular alarm was visible on any of the countenances which she saw, and Véronique began to doubt if the seaman had been in earnest when he told her there was any danger threatened to the “ Samos.”

“ Come now, young woman !” exclaimed a gruff voice near her, “ what are you out of your berth for—we don't want no females on deck at this time of night.”

“ But do just tell me what's the matter,” she said entreatingly, “ why has the steamer stopped ? Are we in any danger ?”

“ Danger !” repeated the old sailor scornfully, “ in course not ! why, what danger do you expect to happen to a ship like this ? You shows your ignorance by putting such a question.”

What was she to believe ? The statements of the two seamen were so contra-



dictory that they amounted to no evidence at all. If she could but see David! but amidst all the faces assembled on deck, the native's was not visible.

But presently, as she glanced timidly from one to the other, Véronique caught sight of the captain, and feeling that he must know the truth of the matter, her fear and anxiety emboldened her to speak to him.

“If you please, Captain,” she began in a low, hesitating voice, “will you tell me if anything is wrong?”

But with an impatient gesture of his hand Captain Henry waved her away from him.

“Don't come bothering here,” he said without even looking at her, “you women must keep to your cabins; you have no business on deck at such an hour,” and rendered still more timid by this rebuff, Véronique turned quickly away, and with a drooping figure and tears of vague alarm upon her cheek, walked back in the direction of the companion-ladder. But before

she had reached it a man had overtaken her, and she heard the voice of Gordon Romilly, saying—

“What is the matter, Véronique? what is it that you wish to know? Tell me; and, perhaps, I can satisfy you.”

“I am only frightened,” she answered slowly in order to conceal the agitation which immediately assailed her, “I am a little frightened—that is all. I woke from my sleep with the noise on deck, and a man said that we were all going to the bottom together; and so I came up to learn the truth, but no one will take the trouble to tell me.”

“I will tell you,” he answered confidently, “there is nothing to be alarmed at, Véronique — not at present. The steamer has grounded, and it is impossible to say, till the morning, when we shall be able to get her off. But there is no immediate danger—and if such should arise, I promise to let you know. Will you trust me?”

“Oh! yes!” she answered with a thrill

of joy, to think that he should care to set her mind at rest.

“And you will try and make yourself easy till the morning, relying on my word that all is safe.”

“Yes, yes!” she said again, and then looking up in his face, she added, with a wan smile, “you know that I was always very foolish about the sea.”

This allusion, which so vividly recalled the days when she had trusted in him, grated on his feelings like a file, and he winced beneath it. Véronique saw the memory she had evoked, and was sorry she had spoken with so little thought.

“Gor-don!” she said with more of the old look and the old tone than she had ever used towards him since their separation, “your promise has set my heart much at rest. I shall sleep now like a little child. I shall no longer be afraid.”

He took her hand in his, held it for a moment, released it with a heavy sigh, and returned whence he had come, whilst she, forgetful apparently that he had broken the

prohibition she had laid upon him, went down to her berth and fell asleep again, with a smile upon her lip at the thought that if danger should arise, Gordon had promised to be the one to break it to her.

Tired from her short and broken sleep, she slept till late upon the following morning; and when (anxious to learn the result of the accident) she quickly dressed herself and went above, she found the deck swarming with passengers and seamen, who ran from one side of the ship to the other, or talked earnestly together in knots of two or three. And meanwhile the "Samos" was lying as immoveable as she had been the night before, and only gave a slow, heavy roll every now and then, as the waves, with a quiet lulling sound, broke against her sides. And the bright sky above them was scarcely less blue than the deep sapphire-tinted waters upon which they lay.

"*Ma sœur,*" said David with a long face as soon as Véronique appeared amongst them, "I fear we are in a bad plight!"



“How so, David? Cannot they get the steamer off?”

“Not the least chance of it! She has struck, hard and fast, upon a rock.”

“On a rock?” grasping his arm, “will she not go to pieces, David? what will become of us all?”

“That remains to be proved, *ma sœur*. But I believe there is no fear of her breaking up for several days to come; therefore, there is no immediate danger.”

“Danger! who talks of danger?” cried the cheery voice of Captain Henry close to them. “I trust, young man, you are not frightening Mademoiselle here, with any idle reports that may have got wind. The only danger we run is of being detained here against our will for a few days.”

“Nevertheless, she’s got the rock right through her bottom,” grumbled a seaman who was busied near them, “and we shall have to work hard night and day at the pumps to keep the water out of the hold—it’s several feet deep there already.”

“But how do you account for the ex-

treme steadiness of the vessel if she has not actually struck?" demanded an inquisitive male passenger of Captain Henry.

"She has struck, sir. I've no wish to deny that; but, if you please, I will explain our exact position to you. Did you ever see a piece of bread on a knife? That's just how the "Samos" has fixed herself upon this rock, the plagues confound it! and that's just how she'll stay upon it till some one comes to take us off."

"And how long will it be first? Not longer than our provisions will last I hope?"

The Captain laughed outright at such a notion.

"Never you fear, sir! we've provisions enough on board to keep you for a year, and a little over that. And as for the time of our release, it may be this afternoon, or to-morrow, or next day, and it certainly *must* be in the course of a week, when the next mail steamer passes this way. Therefore let us try to fancy we are out on a pic-nic, or any other pleasant

jaunt ; and make the time go as fast as we can till then," with which speech and a deceptive smile, Captain Henry walked down stairs to see how matters were getting on in the hold.

"It's all very well for the Captain to talk like that," remarked the same passenger to Gordon Romilly, "but what can he have been about to get us into such a scrape? If the captain of the next mail steamer is a whit more careful, which for the sake of his passengers it is to be hoped he will be, he won't come within hail of us—I understand that we are something like twenty miles out of the track."

"There must have been gross negligence somewhere," replied Gordon Romilly gravely, "but it is the fault of the company who take men into their service ignorant of the navigation of these seas, the most treacherous in the world. This is the first voyage Captain Henry has made in this direction, and he ought to have had a pilot with him."

"If the worst comes to the worst,"

urged the first speaker, "are there enough boats to accommodate us all?"

"I am afraid not!" was the answer, and though it was delivered in a lower voice, Véronique who was standing near, heard every word of it, "and we are more than two hundred miles from Hong-Kong. Yet if we are fortunate, and the weather continues calm, I am assured that it will take fourteen or sixteen days to break up the steamer, though every ebb and flow of the tide widens the breach. But as for there being no danger, as the Captain thought fit to observe, that's all nonsense. A storm, and you know how suddenly they arise in these latitudes, would knock us to pieces in no time; and what chance would there be in such a case, of our boats living in an open sea?"

"God help us," sighed the other, "we are a numerous company."

"And so many women and children," said Gordon Romilly, thinking of his wife, his flaxen-haired baby, and of one other



of the ship's inmates, who was very dear to him.

“Oh! where *is* the doctor?” exclaimed a woman's voice in distress, as a fat stewardess, whose cheeks were blanched with fear, and stained with weeping, rushed up from the saloon, and gazing wildly around her, fell upon the individual in question; “oh! dear! sir, do come down quick to the ladies, for I don't know what on earth to do with them; they've heard of the accident, and they're all in hysterics or faints; and as for the English nurse, Mrs. Lawson, she's gone downright shrieking mad, and has frightened the poor baby almost into fits; and I'm alone, without a soul to help me, and it's a great responsibility, and—”

“There! there! that will do,” replied the doctor testily, “it's always the way with women, when there's anything to be done that requires a little energy,” and off he went in search of his cordials.

“Could I be of any use to you?” demanded Véronique of the stewardess.

“The baby knows me, and I will not add to the confusion, for I am not at all afraid.”

Gordon Romilly turned his grave fond eyes upon her, and regarded her earnestly.

“Lor! my dear, I shall be delighted to have you, come along at once,” exclaimed the fat stewardess. “They’ve almost wore me out with their kicks and screams, and if we are to go to the bottom, why we may as well go together as not.”

“There is no chance of that, I hope,” said Gordon Romilly, as he accompanied the women to the head of the companion stairs, “but,” he added in a low voice, intended only for the ear of Véronique, “if we do go to the bottom, it shall be—  
together!”

“*Vraiment?*” she exclaimed in a tone of pleasure, as she stayed her progress for a moment to regard him. Their eyes met.

“*Vraiment,*” he repeated, “ah! Véronique, you little think—you little know,” and then halted, as though unable to proceed:

“*Oui, oui! je comprends! je comprends,*”

she murmured joyfully, "*et Gor-don ! après cela la mort n'est plus rien.*"

Her tender eyes sought his, the same look of melting love, which she had been used to give him in the days of old, illumined them for an instant, and then she had disappeared down the cabin-stairs, and entered on her field of labour.

A trying field it proved to be. Too-too was soon appeased, and made happy, but to tranquillise his mamma, and his nurse, was a very different matter. Lawson declared that she felt the ship sinking deeper in the water beneath her, every moment, and Lady Rose, who was not much more strong-minded in emergencies than her servant, imagined with each roll that they were going to the bottom ; and their behaviour had proved so infectious, that not one of the lady passengers was mistress of herself.

The Doctor was soon amongst them, scolding them heartily all round, but no persuasion or entreaty operated so forcibly on them, as the example of the little

Sister of Mercy, who moved calmly in their midst, neither ridiculing their fears, or attempting to deny their reason, yet proving by her own demeanour, that she neither shared their feelings, nor could appreciate so open an expression of them.

And yet she knew more of the probable or possible danger that might accrue to the vessel and themselves, than any woman on board of her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Four or five days passed, during which time, both passengers and crew tried to make as light as they could of the great fear which loomed nearer to them with every ebb and flow of the tide, and Véronique had become so necessary to the comfort of the ladies in the saloon, that they would hardly let her out of their sight.

When one afternoon, to the intense joy of everybody on board, a sail was reported in the offing, and presently a huge Chinese junk hove in sight, and stood at a short distance from the ill-fated "Samos." Cap-



tain Henry had no hope that she would be able to take them off the wreck, but as she was evidently on her way to Hong-Kong, he directed a boat to be at once lowered, and four of the Chinese lascars, who formed part of the crew of the steamer, to pull off to the junk, and beg the owner to make their condition known to the English authorities at the port for which they were bound, with the request that they would at once send out a vessel to rescue them. The Chinamen were only too pleased to be appointed to the task, and doubtless, could they have obtained berths on board the junk, would never have returned with an answer to the "Samos." But their reception was different to what they had anticipated.

The *amor patriæ* was doubtless very strong in the breasts of their countrymen, but they loved personal property better, and following therefore the instinct of their noble nature, they confiscated the boat, (thereby much reducing the chances of escape for the passengers of the "Samos,")

and stripping the unfortunate lascars of their scanty clothing, cast them back naked into the sea, to sink or swim, as they thought best, wherefrom three, from the distance between the vessels, were unwillingly compelled to choose the first alternative, and only one returned, half dead with the exertion he had made, to relate the story of his welcome.

The failure of this attempt, and the loss of one boat out of three, (for one had been washed overboard when the steamer struck), made Captain Henry look very grave, but it hatched a plan which had been long incubating in the minds of several of his companions.

“Look here,” they said, “it is possible we may miss seeing the mail steamer altogether, and it is evident that we need not look for aid from any of these native crafts. The weather is now calm, and likely to remain so, but every day increases our chance of having a squall. Let some of us take a boat, the smaller of the two, and make an attempt to reach Hong-Kong, and

procure aid. If we succeed, we shall save you all, if we fail, you will not be in a much worse position than before."

"It is a noble offer, gentlemen," said Captain Henry, "but it will be a great risk. Two hundred miles in an open boat. Who would undertake it?"

"I will, for one," exclaimed Gordon Romilly, as he stood forward from amongst the crowd.

"*You*, Captain Romilly, with your wife and child? You must think of them, sir."

"It is because I *do* think of them that I am willing to go," was the decided answer; "whose life should be risked for theirs if it is not mine?"

"And I will go with you," said the first lieutenant.

"And let me go, Monsieur," urged David, as he advanced towards Gordon Romilly, "I have a strong arm, and I hope I have a strong heart, and I have not appreciated you, Monsieur, during the term of our acquaintance, and I feel that I should like to share this danger by your side."

At this address Gordon Romilly turned in surprise, but meeting the frank look of the young native, thrust forth his hand, and grasped the black one warmly.

“So you shall go, David! we will go together, and do our best for the helpless creatures dependent on us. I am glad to have you.”

“And take me, sir! and me, sir! and me!” exclaimed several voices from among the seamen.

“Stay, my men!” replied the Captain, “you cannot all go—two more will be as many as the boat can carry. Let the two men who spoke first be the ones to accompany Captain Romilly and Lieutenant Walker. And now all hands to the boat, and let us see her packed and provisioned before night falls.”

He kept them busily employed, lest idleness should make their courage fail, and before that evening the little craft was stocked with all that could be spared them, and it had been settled that they should start with the dawn.



Lady Rose went into violent hysterics when she heard of the enterprise upon which her husband was bound, although she did not half comprehend the danger which was comprised in it ; but Véronique heard the news in silence, though her rapidly beating heart would have deprived her of utterance, even had she wished to speak.

But Gordon Romilly was busy soothing the fears of his wife with many an assurance that he would be certain to bring back help for them, and it was not until just as he was stepping into the boat, that he had an opportunity to speak to Véronique, who, pale and patient, was standing by the gangway, having but just released her clasp of David's arm.

“ If I do not return,” he said, hurriedly, “ my boy—Véronique—my boy !—”

“ *Je le soignerai comme mon propre fils,*” she answered.

“ And you will pray for me ?” he said, with a farewell glance.

“ *Comme toujours,*” she replied, and then.

he uttered a husky "God bless you," and swung himself down into the little boat which was waiting to receive him, and the gallant five, followed by the cheers of the passengers and crew of the "Samos," set off on their daring expedition.

But when the boat was nearly out of sight, and the cheering had died away, and the waving of handkerchiefs was over, they were astonished to find the little Sister of Mercy lying under one of the benches in a dead swoon.

"It's over exertion," said the Doctor, as he occupied himself with her recovery, "and no wonder, for what this poor creature has gone through during the last few days is known only to herself, and she's anything but strong! I doubt if she has twelvemonths of life left in her, take what care of her they may."

## CHAPTER XII. AND LAST.

### TOGETHER.

TEN days were born and died, ten weary anxious days, during which, notwithstanding the Captain's idle boast, provisions and fresh water had both run very short, and the sea had so gained in the hold that, as the old sailor had prophesied, the pumps were going night and day, and the male passengers were beginning to take their share of the labour, and still the "Samos" remained fast wedged upon the pointed rock, but rolling more and more irregularly with the flow and ebb of every tide, and shewing symptoms, which were evident enough to those skilled in seamanship, that a few more days at the outside would see

the struggle ended. Yet they scanned the horizon for coming deliverance in vain, for no trace or sign was to be seen of the return of the boats, on which hung their best hopes of rescue.

Captain Henry was growing impatient ; he saw that at any moment their fate might be decided, and he had but that morning given orders for the jolly-boat (their last resource) to be made ready for sea, affirming that if they heard or saw nothing of their absent companions during the next twelve hours, he should start the women and children on their way.

“ There is no need for us all to be sacrificed,” he added gravely ; “ and I, for one, have given up all hope of seeing poor Romilly or Walker again. It was next to impossible their strength should hold out until they reached Hong-Kong.”

Véronique heard his words, and shuddered at them. She too had almost resigned hope of their return ; and though she could with the utmost calmness contemplate a violent death for herself, she



had no such power when the danger extended to those she loved.

But as she sat by the side of Lady Rose that afternoon, bathing her temples with *eau-de-cologne*, and trying to soothe her fears, which were almost abject, a glad shout from overhead struck upon her ear, and she sprang to her feet trembling with eager expectation.

“Don’t leave me, Marie!” exclaimed Lady Rose in a fretful voice, as she attempted to lay the lady’s head, which she had been supporting on her bosom, on the cushions of the saloon sofa. “I always feel so frightened when you go away; if anything were to happen whilst you are on deck, I know they would leave us all to drown here like rats in a cage.”

A stranger would have smiled to hear this appeal from a stout buxom young woman of five-and-twenty, to the fragile attenuated little creature who stood by her side. But Véronique did not smile. Her tender care and attention to the wife of Gordon Romilly during those ten days of

miserable suspense had been noticed by all on board the "Samos," and had purged her own spirit of much that, in the face of death she had bitterly realised, had been far too gross and earthly before. She had watched by her, and soothed and caressed her, till Lady Rose had come to forget the difference in their stations, and to think of the Sister of Mercy only as an ally and protector ; and now, when her plaintive request was made known, Véronique replied to it much as she would have done to that of an unreasoning child.

"Dear Madame! I will not be more than a minute away—and you must not fancy that anything is going to happen to us in so short a time. But I hear them shouting—hark! can you not hear it also? and I hope—I almost think—that it must be the boats come back again. For what else should they shout? Oh! let me go and ascertain for you?"

She gazed in the wife's face, expecting to see her spring to her feet also in glad anticipation of her husband's return. But

Lady Rose only sunk further back upon the cushions.

“Very well, Marie, but pray don’t be long ; and tell Captain Romilly to come to me at once. I’m sure what I’ve gone through during these last ten days no one would imagine. I feel sometimes as though I should be thankful if the steamer were to go down at once, and let there be an end of it ;” and a few tears escaped from her closed eyelids, and rolled slowly down her cheeks.

Véronique looked at her for a moment, and then stooped and kissed them away. It was not the first kiss which had passed between her and Gordon Romilly’s wife.

“You’re a good girl, Marie,” was the acknowledgment she received. “I don’t know what I should have done without you !” and then Véronique caught up little Too-too, who was playing near, and ran on deck with him.

It was true ! it was really true. Everybody on board the wreck was crowded together at one end of it, gazing eagerly



across the sea, to where the boats were pulling slowly but surely towards them.

Véronique trembled with her exceeding happiness, and her eyes were so dim that she could not see ; her mind was filled with but one idea, that he was safe ; and she did not even start to hear the captain, after a careful survey with his glass, exclaim—

“ Yes ! ’tis them, sure enough ; but they don’t seem to be coming back much richer than they went. One native prahu ; what is that amongst so many ? Well, well, ’tis the will of God, and we must manage the best way we can.”

In a few minutes more the boats were alongside, and the adventurers on deck—their number undiminished, though their appearance was sadly changed.

Captain Henry rushed forward, and grasped the hand of his lieutenant, and for a little while nothing went on but handshaking and attempted congratulations, which mostly died away in nothing ; until Too-too recognised his father with a glad shout, and Gordon Romilly seized the child



in his arms, and buried his face in its little fair dimpled neck. Then Véronique, notwithstanding that David was claiming her attention and receiving her thanks, had leisure to scrutinise his appearance, and it made her heart ache to observe how thin and sunburnt he had become, and how the exposure and privation of ten days seemed to have changed him from a young man to an old one.

“Captain Romilly!” exclaimed Captain Henry as he advanced to where the father and the little child still stood locked together, “it is impossible that we should express the gratitude we feel towards you and these other gentlemen, and these two brave fellows here, for the effort you have made in our behalf. It was a gallant action, in the performance of which I fear you must have suffered much, but which—”

“Pray say no more!” replied Gordon Romilly; “if we could not make a struggle for our own lives, and the lives of those dearer to us than ourselves,”—here he pressed the infant closer to him, but his

gaze was directed to the drooping form of Véronique—"we should not be worthy the name of men. I only wish we had been more successful!"

"Tell us briefly what has happened to you."

"We went on gloriously for three days after we had left the 'Samos;' there was hardly a ripple on the water; and except for the anxiety we felt for those we had left behind, we might have imagined ourselves on a pleasure trip. But then we met one of those huge tidal waves—what do you call them, Walker?"

"Bores!" said the Lieutenant. "We were keeping as close to the coast as we could, for fear of accidents, when we encountered a 'bore,' and you may imagine, Captain, what happened to us then. Our boat was tossed over and over—provisions, clothing, everything, including the compass, washed away; and the only thing left for us to do was to take our seats athwart the overturned boat till help came to us."

"And how were you rescued?"

“By some natives, coasting, as they always do, with wood. David, being most fortunately able to speak their lingo, made them understand that it would be worth their while to be humane, so they picked us up, together with the boat, and carried us as far as the next native settlement, where we landed; and, knowing it would be useless to attempt to reach Hong-Kong without a compass, purchased the prahu, the only one they had, laid in a fresh stock of provisions, and returned whence we came. And I assure you,” concluded the Lieutenant, with a laugh (for men often laugh loudest when they are most anxious), “it’s by a mere chance you see us here, for all we could do was to row straight back in the direction we had come. When Romilly said he saw the wreck this morning, I could hardly believe it was the truth.”

Then they all commenced to pour fresh thanks upon their preservers, from which Gordon Romilly seemed anxious to escape.

“My wife is well?” he said interrogatively to Captain Henry.

“Yes, she is, sir!” was the reply, “and I think I may add, thanks to this young lady,” pointing to Véronique, “who has been a true Sister of Mercy amongst us, strengthening the courage of the weak, and doubling that of the strong. She has attended Lady Rose by day and night, sir, and I’ll venture to say has earned your gratitude by it.”

At this tribute the head of Véronique drooped lower and lower, and she dared not trust herself even to make a remonstrance at the general murmur of acquiescence by which it was concluded.

Gordon Romilly did not attempt to thank her, but he took her hand, and pressed it, before, with his child still clinging round his neck, he passed down the companion-stairs in search of his wife.

“Oh! Véronique! what a man he is!” exclaimed David, as soon as he was fairly out of sight, “how little we know of one another; I take shame to myself to think



how often I have spoken against him, and called him vain, and frivolous, and pleasure seeking. He is none of all these ; he is one of the noblest creatures that God ever made !”

“ You are speaking of Captain Romilly,” she said, her eyes lighting up at the sound of his praises, “ Ah, he may have been all you thought him, David, but I was always sure that, when necessity called for it, he would prove himself of better stuff—tell me of him—what has he done ?”

“ Everything that a generous-hearted, self-denying gentleman could do,” replied the native, enthusiastically. “ He denied himself in every way for the sake of us, and of those men ; he wouldn’t allow our courage to flag for a moment, and when we were all hanging on the boat together, and expecting death to overtake us every instant, his calmness was an example to us all. Oh, *ma sœur* ! I wish you could have seen him—you never would have forgotten it, but he bears on his face the signs of

what he has gone through for us—God bless him !”

“ I am so glad—I am so very glad !” she said in a quiet voice, whilst the tears coursed each other down her cheeks for joy.

“ Now, Mr. David !” exclaimed the Captain, (for David was the only name by which the native was ever known), “ we have no time for idling. The jolly-boat is ready for launching, and we must pack these things into the prahu as quick as we can. I must see those three boats start before this evening, or I shan’t sleep with a quiet conscience.”

“ But Captain !” said Véronique, laying a timid hand upon his arm, “ is it possible that we can all get into those three boats ?”

She had walked a few paces from where David sat, and they were alone.

“ Well, my dear, the jolly-boat holds forty, and the prahu will take another twenty, and the little gig five or six.”

“ And there are eighty of us,” she said.

The Captain coughed.

“ Well, yes ! but we must manage somehow, and we’ll look after you, child, don’t be afraid—if any one deserves to be taken off this wreck, it’s yourself ; you’ve often reminded me, with your sweet, quiet ways, of my own dear girl at home—at home !” and there he halted, as though rather overcome by the allusion. “ Well, God reward you, my dear, wherever you are—and there’ll be a place for you in the boats, never fear.”

“ I wasn’t thinking of myself,” she answered, quietly.

In another hour everything was ready, the three boats were gently rocking alongside, stocked with all the necessaries that the steamer could afford them, and waiting for their loads, and the passengers, with sundry small bundles in their hands, were assembled on the quarter-deck, silent and anxious.

“ Now, gentlemen !” exclaimed the Captain, cheerfully, “ we must do all things in order. First, put the women and children

in the jolly-boat, with all their comforts about them, and see that they have plenty of protection against heat and rain. Ah! Lady Rose! I'm glad to see you up on deck, and I hope that you will soon find yourself on shore, with an end put to all your troubles. The boy looks well, Captain Romilly, doesn't he? we didn't starve him whilst you were away. Not at this end, you lubber! stow all the baggage forward, and leave the best seats for the women. Now, Sir! will you be so good as to hand Lady Rose, and the nurse and child into the jolly-boat, and I'll look after the other ladies!"

"Oh! but where's Marie? I can't go without Marie, and she's got my warm shawl, too!" exclaimed Lady Rose, in a pathetic voice.

"I am here, Madame, close to you," replied Véronique, and Gordon Romilly impatiently twitched the shawl which she was carrying for his wife, out of her hand, and insisted upon taking it himself.

"Now, my men, look sharp—all the rest



of the passengers into the prahu, and the lot men into that and the gig. Don't overload the boats — there's no chance for an overladen boat in a squall. No, Walker! not another word—I insist upon your going; think of your mother and sisters."

"Captain! you must either come as well, or I shall stop with you!"

"Nonsense, lad! I stay by the ship till there isn't a plank left of her, it's my duty — think of the poor fellows who have made no mistake, yet suffer with me—and don't go against me in this; I promised your mother to look after you:" and with a gentle yet forcible action he pushed the young man upon the gangway ladder.

The boats were now all ready, and the Captain, with about a dozen seamen, stood at the ship's side, waiting to see them start.

"God speed you!" he said, in farewell, "you will send us back help, if you can; and if you can't, there's help above for all of us!"

“ Amen ! ” ejaculated one of the doomed seamen by his side.

“ Captain ! can you spare us more rope ? ” shouted a voice from the jolly-boat.

“ I ’ ll go and fetch it, ” he replied, and walked in the direction of the hold.

But at this moment a cry was heard, and a great noise of scuffling feet, and the fat stewardess, whom nobody had missed, struggled panting up the companion-stairs, with a huge bundle in her hands.

“ Lor ! ye ’ re never off ! ” she exclaimed, “ I thought you ’ d be an hour or more getting things ready. Ain ’ t it lucky I catch ’ d you ? Here, Jack ! take my bundle, and help me in for mercy ’ s sake ! ” and she commenced to descend the gangway.

“ It ’ s of no use ! ” said the man at the stern of the jolly-boat, “ you ’ re too late, missus— we ’ re all as full as we can hold already. ”

“ Surely there is room for one more ! ” said Gordon Romilly.

“ No, sir, there ain ’ t, ” replied the sailor, who was one of the two who had accom-

panied him on his expedition in search of help, "Nothing is so dangerous as an overstocked boat, and we're fuller than we ought to be at the present."

"But there is room for this woman," said Gordon Romilly, quietly, as he stepped out of the boat on to the gangway, and amidst a profusion of thanks, handed the fat stewardess into his own place.

"You wouldn't never, sir!" said the seaman, expostulatingly.

"Hush!" was the low reply, "what—for a woman—it would be cowardly to leave her behind."

"But, sir, think of what you've gone through, and your lady wanting you, and all—it's too great a sacrifice!"

"My man, you must let me judge for myself—only if you would do me a favour, don't let *her* know till you get to land—say I'm in one of the other boats!" and with that he quickly disappeared up the gangway ladder.

Véronique felt as though she were turned to stone. With ears made sharp

by love, she had taken in every word of the conversation between the seaman and Gordon Romilly, and she guessed the drift of it—that he was about to sacrifice himself—to stay behind, and meet a cruel death upon the wreck for the sake of a fellow-creature. Should he die alone?

With the rapidity of thought, and the energy of love, she had leapt to her feet, and was stumbling after him.

“Now, young woman!” exclaimed the seaman in the stern, “where are you off to? we shall start in a minute.”

“Only to fetch something!” she murmured, hurriedly, and was gone before the other occupants of the boat had observed she was in motion.

At the last all was hurry and confusion, as was but natural under circumstances of so trying a character. The Captain came back and threw the rope to them, bidding them start at once, and God speed, and then turned away to hide the emotion which he could not help feeling, but was too proud to let them see.



Amidst tears from both men and women, and a dismal attempt at a cheer from the poor creatures left upon their living grave, the three boats got under weigh, and were soon as specks upon the distant ocean.

“God help and protect them!” prayed Captain Henry, as he watched their progress.

“Amen! amen!” said a deep voice near him

“Captain Romilly, what *you* here?”

“Yes, Captain! there was not room for all, and it was to save a woman: we can but die once.”

“That is what I am trying to realise for myself, but it is hard—hard. I am not a young man. I have a wife—poor wife—and children, all dependent on me—and—and—you will forgive this weakness, sir: I trust God does!” and Captain Henry buried his face upon his outstretched arms.

“How long will she last?” inquired Gordon Romilly, when his emotion had subsided.

“Not twelve hours—if that. I thought

it would have been longer, this morning, but the wind is rising fast—nothing to signify for the boats, sir, I daresay,” observing Romilly’s startled air, “but it will be the end of us.”

“Well! since it is to come, the sooner the better.”

“Perhaps so! perhaps so! but you will excuse my leaving you! I feel that I should like to spend these last hours alone in my cabin with my own thoughts and heaven.”

To this decision, Gordon Romilly could make no objection, and walking away by himself, he took a seat at the further end of the steamer.

“Yes, it is quite certain that we must all die alone!” he thought as he did so, “even were we on our beds and surrounded by faces we love, we should scarcely be less alone than in an hour like this!” and then he looked out across the line of sea where the boats had last been seen, and thought of the precious freight they were conveying. He thought of Lady Rose, and wondered whether she would mourn much when she

found that he was gone : and he thought of Too-too, and of the hopes he had once entertained of seeing him grow up to be a good and great man : but he thought most of all of Véronique, his poor, little, deserted wife, whose pale, sad face seemed engraven on his memory.

“ God forgive me ! ” he groaned, “ a death like this, cheerless and alone, is but a fit recompence for such a life as mine has been.”

But even as he thought thus, the touch of a cold hand was laid on his, and turning he saw the woman whom he thought of, in her sombre dress and close cropped hair, standing smilingly beside him. He could not have started more violently had she been a visitant from the dead.

“ Véronique ! ” he exclaimed, rising suddenly to his feet and grasping her by the arm, “ Véronique ! Véronique ! why are you here ? by what mistake have you been left behind ? Did I not place you in the boat myself ? Oh, my God ! by what carelessness of mine has this fatal error been committed ? ”

“By none, Gor-don,” she answered, with the same tender smile upon her countenance, “I remained here of my own accord! Did you not promise me that if we went to the bottom it should be together? Did you think my love so feeble that I would let you die alone?”

“For me!” he said, staggering backwards, “for *me!* have you really sacrificed yourself for me? Oh, Véronique, my love! my darling!” He opened his arms wide as he spoke, and she flew into them, joyous as though it had been the embrace of life instead of death.

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“And now, let us talk no more of such unhappy subjects,” said Véronique, as, after an hour’s discourse, she nestled down upon the deck beside his knee, and laid her worn cheek on his hand. “That is all past and gone, Gor-don, I have forgiven it, the good God has forgiven it. Let us blot it from our memories during these last precious hours.”



They were quite alone, for the Captain had locked himself into his cabin, and the poor sailors, as such men will, were busy searching for liquor to stifle the sensation of fear to which they were so unaccustomed.

“Do you remember,” Véronique continued, in her caressing voice, “how frightened I used to be of the sea? so frightened, that I used to scold myself for giving way to foolish fancies, and yet, perhaps, it was but an instinct of my coming death. Yet when I went to seek thee, Gordon, I knew no fear, and now, thy presence takes it all away for me! You have not quite forgotten those happy days upon the Neilgherry Hills,” she rambled on: whilst he, listening to her girlish talk and remembering the doom fast coming on her, could hardly answer for his pain, “those first few happy days when we were married?”

“I have never forgotten them, my darling.”

“When we used to take long walks to-

gether, and lose ourselves upon the boundless hills, and you said you would like to live for ever gypsying with me, and we used to gather flowers, and oh, Gordon! that fearful day when the cheetah stood across our path and snarled at us?"

"I remember my brave girl's conduct on that occasion, and how she flung herself between me and danger, Véronique."

"How could I do otherwise?" she sighed, "thou wert my life!"

And so they talked on, not passionately, but fondly and very much at peace, with hands fast locked together, until the evening shadows fell: the last evening which they should spend on earth.

"Could you sleep, my darling?" said Gordon Romilly as he wrapped a warm rug about her fragile figure.

"Yes! if thou art with me and wilt hold my hand," she answered quickly, and when he assured her that he would, she proved her words by falling into a childlike slumber, whilst he sat by her side supporting her head upon his knee, and watching

the moonbeams as they played upon her pure and placid features.

But just at midnight, the "Samos," which had been rolling more violently than usual during the last few hours, first giving a convulsive heave, as though she were attempting to lift herself off the rock on which she was embedded, sunk down with a groan and a shiver in her old place again, and Gordon Romilly knew by the gurgling sound which immediately followed, that their time was come, and she was filling fast.

"Véronique," he cried, "my love—my wife—awake."

She started up, and meeting his eyes, comprehended in a moment what had happened ; but all consciousness of fear was lost in the joy which irradiated her countenance at the name by which he had called her.

"*Ta femme !*" she exclaimed as she cast her arms about him, "*ta femme ! oh ! Gordon ! répètes-le encore une fois.*"

"Yes ! yes ! my wife ! my only wife !" he answered straining her to his bosom, and as he did so, and heard her gently murmur—

“ *Seigneur ! souviens-toi de nous, quand tu viendras en ton règne,*” the cold waters ran smoothly over the deck on which they were seated.

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The three boats reached Hong-Kong in safety, and then Lieutenant Walker, eager to go to the rescue of his captain and the other ill-fated creatures who had remained upon the wreck of the “Samos,” procured the efficient aid of a government steamer, and proceeded at once to the spot where they had left them.

“ Is that there the rock, sir ?” enquired a seaman who was on the look out for it, as he pointed to a shapeless black stump which appeared above the level of the sea.

“ That ? oh ! no, it cannot be !” exclaimed Lieutenant Walker ; “ besides, where is the ‘ Samos ? ’ ”

But on a reference to chart and compass, it was proved unmistakably to be the same.

Where was the “ Samos ? ”

The blue waves, calm, and clear as crys-



tal, were lapping the sides of the ugly misshapen thing, as though they were enamoured of its deeds ; the heavenly sky, lighted up with a brilliancy unknown in our northern latitudes, was smiling down on it as if to say “ well done ; ” the sea-birds were hovering about its pinnacle and wheeling round it with hoarse screeches of delight ; but there was neither sign nor token of what had been there—not a plank, nor a rope, nor a spar—to remind one that he stood above the “ Samos ’ ” grave.

“ This is the rock, sure enough, ” repeated the same seaman, “ but as for the poor creatures as we came out for to rescue—all I says is, the Lord have mercy on their souls. ”

Lieutenant Walker stood looking at the spot for a few minutes in complete silence, and then he turned quickly away, and sought the refuge of his cabin.

THE END.























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