



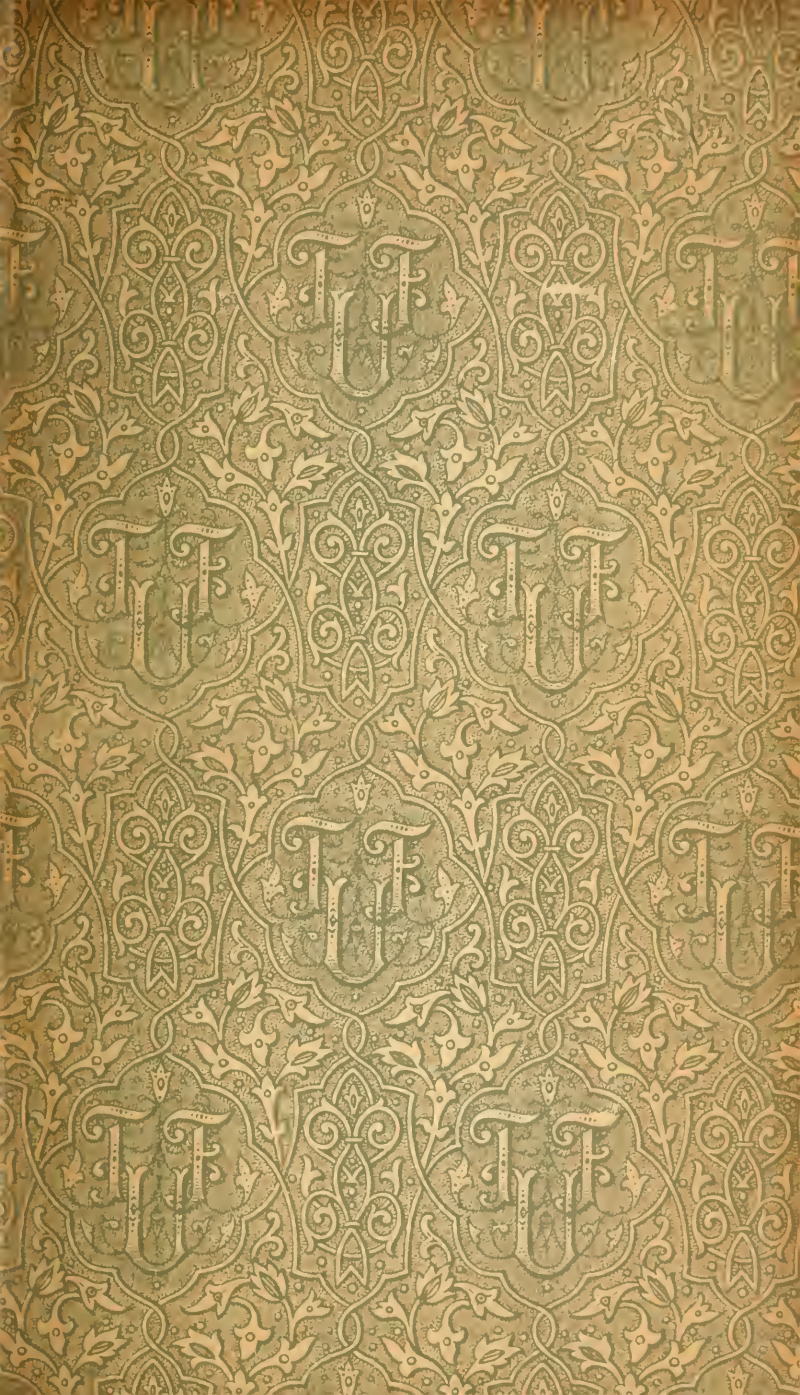
FORD
H. HUEFFER

THE SHIFTING
OF THE FIRE





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THE SHIFTING OF THE FIRE



THE
INDEPENDENT NOVEL SERIES

THE SHIFTING OF THE FIRE
A
FANTÔME D'ORIENT
JEAN DE KERDREN

H. FORD HUEFFER

THE

SHIFTING

OF

THE FIRE

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'THE BROWN OWL,' 'THE FEATHER,' ETC.

London

T. FISHER UNWIN

PATERNOSTER SQUARE

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TO
FORD MADOX BROWN, Esq.,
THIS LITTLE BOOK
IS GRATEFULLY
Dedicated
BY HIS
GRANDSON,
THE AUTHOR.

1034100



The Shifting of the Fire.

—o—

CHAPTER I.

'Farewell,' she cried, 'and come again to-morrow,'
'Farewell, I could not, for I supped with sorrow.'



WITHOUT the house the wind was blusteringly bringing down the few leaves that remained on the trees skirting the north side of the park, and occasionally beating in a solid mass against the sides and windows of the house, or playing with undulating shrieks round the chimney-pots. The air was filled with a mighty rustling that drowned the distant rumble of traffic, never ceasing in this our city. Without the house the air was grey with twilight, and hazy yellow high up around the street lamps. The year was reluctantly tottering through its last sixth of life, and the boisterous winds shrieked in derision at its decline. But within the house calm was on everything, even the sound of the wind without hardly made itself

heard, and certainly did not drown the tick of the great old Dutch-cased clock in the passage. In the drawing-room all was darkness and quiet save where the coals cast a glow on to the red tilework of the open fireplace. A young girl, standing before the fire with her elbows on her hands, was gazing at the dim reflection of her face, lit up by the red fire below, in the great glass over the mantelpiece—gazing with the lazy satisfaction of one who feels happy in her connections with the world in general, cosy in her immediate surroundings, and contented with the occasional glimpses that she caught of her face in the glass when jets of flame stole out from the red mass of coal, causing a little more light for an instant. And the tenor of her thoughts was this:—

‘Yes, I do think I’m really pretty—at least by this light I seem quite beautiful—but it may be the light that does it, and I suppose I *am* apt to look at myself with an indulgent eye, and only from the side of my face which looks best. I know sometimes when I am getting up in the morning, before I am quite dressed, and I happen to catch a glimpse of my face in the glass, from the left-hand side at the top, it quite makes my heart fall for a moment when I see how hard my face looks, and then I spend some minutes until I get the best position, where it looks *really* pretty, and I think to myself I will always keep that side of my face towards people when I am speaking to them; but somehow, when I *do*

see somebody, I always forget about it. But, oh dear! how dreadfully vain I am getting. Only, I do wish I knew whether people think I'm handsome or not—that is, I don't care so much about *people*, other people, it's Clem really I mean. I hope *he* thinks I'm pretty; at any rate he says he does, and I don't think he'd do that unless he meant it. Oh dear! I wish I was a man! Men don't need to bother about their looks; at least it doesn't go for so much as it does with us—like Clem, now. He isn't so *very* handsome, though he is, too, but it's more in his expression or— No, it's not that that makes me love him so. It's—well, I don't know what it is exactly. I wonder why he loves me, unless he thinks me really pretty—it can't be for money, because I haven't got any. He has it all; in fact I sometimes wish he weren't so rich, because it looks as if I were scheming to catch him. But I'm sure it isn't so; at least, of course, I do *want* him, but it isn't for his money. I wonder why he doesn't come. I've never known him to be so late before. There's six striking. That must be a cab stopping at the door. I hope it's him. Oh dear! I wish I was sure it was, then I'd go down and open the door, but it might be a stranger. I can't understand why it is that I always feel on edge when he's coming, it's just as if I didn't believe he loved me. Oh, here's Martha—what a time she's been!'

The servant passed the drawing-room, and the girl sank into a chair in an ecstasy of

expectation, listening with all her body. The maid's step went along the passage, and then there was a second's pause before the click of the lock. A great burst of sound swept the tumult from without into the house. The gas in the hall flickered wildly, and the pictures on the passage wall flung violently upwards and outwards with a series of crashes that seemed to threaten immediate destruction to their frames and glasses. The sound died away at the closing of the door as suddenly as it had arisen, and in the silence that ensued the girl heard a voice that made her heart leap say: 'Miss Ryland in?' and the servant answer demurely, 'Yes, sir; she's in the drawing-room.'

Then a moment's pause as he took off his overcoat, and the door was pushed open from its position on the jar.

A man's figure, standing out silhouette-wise against the brightness of the passage behind. His eyes were unaccustomed to the darkness, and the girl was sitting outside the circle of the fire's red glow.

'Are you here, Edith?' he asked; but Edith made no answer, being for the moment in a teasing mood. 'I suppose she'll be coming in a minute,' he continued aloud to himself, and he sat down on the sofa, for he knew the position of the furniture in the room, even though it was very dark. For some moments silence reigned supreme; but suddenly the fire shifted—a blaze of flame shot upwards. By its light the girl became plainly visible.

‘Why, you *were* there,’ the man said, and she laughed, merry at the success of her little trick.

‘Well, you *are* a lover,’ she said. ‘Why, anyone else would have said that my eyes were like stars, and that they felt my presence on the air.’

‘Oh, as to that,’ he answered, with a smile, ‘I wouldn’t compliment the stars by naming them in the same breath with your eyes—and as for feeling your presence on the air, I am always dreaming of you, and so I couldn’t really tell you were here, don’t you see?’

‘No, I don’t,’ she answered. ‘But I won’t have any explanations. I’m deeply offended. I’m going to take you severely to task for coming so late on my birthday—and you never even wished me many happy returns of the day.’

‘Well, but my dear little girl you never gave me time.’

‘Oh, nonsense,’ she answered. ‘I don’t believe you remembered about it at all—you shut yourself up in your horrid laboratory, and never come and see me more than twice a day, and then you’ve generally burnt an eyebrow off and turned one of your hands blue, and you *always* smell of tobacco and sulphuretted hydrogen. I believe you care a great deal more if one of your old experiments goes wrong than if you make me angry.’

‘You really are a stupid little chatterbox,’ he retorted, ‘and I’ve a good mind not to give you the present I’ve brought you if—’

'Oh, have you got me a present? How nice; do let me see it.'

'You'd better light a candle,' he said. 'How is it you're all in the dark?'

'Well, you see, that's all your fault. I've been waiting for you ever since three o'clock, and somehow I've not been in the mood for practising, or anything, and I just sat still and waited, so you see you've wasted my whole afternoon.'

'I don't see what *I* had to do with your not practising, at all events.'

'Well, firstly, I wasn't in the right mood, and then I couldn't set to and practise when you might be coming in and interrupting me at any moment, don't you see? I can't find any matches, and you haven't got any, of course, when they're wanted. I shall have to light it at the fire, then it'll get all smutty.'

When the candle threw a little light on the scene she came towards him.

'Now, let me look at your present,' she said.

He drew a small object from his pocket and handed it to her. She held it to the light. It was a little bottle full of some dark fluid, and it had on it a great 'Poison' label.

'Why, whatever is it?' she asked, too startled to believe her eyes.

'That is the result of five years' constant experimenting and research. You are the only person in the world who possesses a drop of it,' he answered as sententiously as he could.

But what *is* it?' she asked again.

'Oh, well, I'm not going to tell you just what it's made of, because you are quite sure to go and tell someone, and then I should lose all the credit of the discovery. It is a vegetable poison as a matter of fact.'

'But what a frightful thing to give me for a present!'

'It's one of the most powerful there is going, you know,' he said conciliatorily.

'It's too horrible!' was all she replied.

'Why, Professor Webb said, only this afternoon, that he considered you a most fortunate young lady to possess such a unique specimen. You know how old Webb speaks. He said, "Well, Hollebhone, you are to be congratulated. I always did consider you my best pupil, though I don't altogether approve of some of your work—but still, on the whole—on the whole I am satisfied with you, and I certainly will make you my assistant professor when my present one leaves, which will not be for some years, I am afraid—but if you are still then of the same mind you shall have the post, and when I die you will have the professorship, if I have any influence in the university, though I can't see what a rich young fellow like you can want with a professorship. However, I suppose it's your hobby, and you must have something to keep you employed." So, you see, there is at least someone who can see the merits of my discovery. But you seem rather disappointed with my present.'

‘Oh, no, I’m not,’ she said, with a little sigh of resignation that belied her words, ‘only a poison is such a nasty thing to think of. It’s just as if you wanted me to commit suicide. However, of course, it’s awfully clever of you to have discovered it, and I’m very proud of you—only, a poison is hardly worth the trouble.’

He smiled.

‘Ah, I thought you wouldn’t appreciate my talents, and so it was best to be on the safe side. Just go out into the hall and bring in the parcel that’s there for you.’

She did so, and returned carrying a violin case in her hand.

‘Why, it must be a fiddle,’ she said.

‘Open it and you’ll see,’ he answered.

She did so, and after having unswathed the silk handkerchief that covered it, displayed a violin.

‘Oh, my goodness, what a beauty it looks!’ she said delightedly. ‘Who is it by, I wonder?’ and she took it to the light and peered into the inside for the mark. Her eyes dilated with wonder a second after. ‘Why, Clem,’ she said, ‘it can’t be a *real* Strad?’

‘I don’t know what else it can be, then,’ was Clem’s answer. ‘Here’s its pedigree for you from the very day it was made.’

‘Oh, but, Clem,’ she said, ‘it’s like a dream. But you must have ruined yourself to get it. Oh, you are a dear boy—only, I don’t know how to thank you.’

‘Why, Edie, you needn’t thank me—it’s *I* that shall have the pleasure when you play to me, don’t you see, so I’m really selfish—and as to expense, why, I don’t spend a tenth of my income, and what’s the use of money if one doesn’t spend it.’

Just then a knock came at the street door and cut short the conversation.

‘That must be Julia come back,’ she said.

‘Where has she been?’ he asked.

‘Oh, I don’t know. She was going out to see about a concert dress for our tour. You know what a tease she is. She said she was going to be in to lunch, in order not to let us be alone for a moment, just because she knows I’ve got such a lot of private things to say to you. That is certainly one of the drawbacks of setting up housekeeping with another girl if she’s a tease.’

‘Well, but what have you got so very private to tell me? I haven’t heard any of it as yet.’

‘Oh, it’s just things,’ she answered. ‘Here’s Martha come to answer the door.’

In a moment the lady called Julia entered. She seemed as if she brought some of the breeze from outside into the quietness of the room as she came in.

‘Oh, here you are, Mr Hollebone,’ she said; ‘seems an age since I saw you last—must be quite twenty-four hours. Edie’s been fretting so, you can’t think. She thought you’d deserted her. Now, when I have a young man I make him come round five times a

day as long as his money lasts, and then I jilt him—don't I, Edie?’

‘Sure I don't know, Jujube. I never saw any of your young men so I can't say,’ she answered.

‘Well, I tell you what, Idiot—by-the-bye that's a new pun—Edie-ot, don't you see? Just suits you!’

‘I've heard that several times before,’ said Hollebone feebly.

‘*Have you really?*’ she answered. ‘Now, if I were a man and a person called me an idiot I should knock him down, and that would teach him never to do so again.’

‘Oh, Miss Tubbs, you really are too dreadfully sharp,’ with a sort of agonised emphasis on the cognomen.

‘What a frightful thing it is to have a name like mine. It sort of shuts me up when anyone uses it. One can't be sarcastic when one's opponent can retort, “Oh, Miss Tu-ubbs,” as you do, and I'm sure it half ruins our concerts when one sees one of Brahms's Hungarian dances, arranged for violin—Miss Ryland accompanied by Miss Tubbs—why, it makes people laugh when they think of a tub in connection with a dance. I'm sure when I die “tubs” will be found on my heart.’

‘Well, at all events Edie and I will weep tubs-full of tears,’ said Hollebone, with the air of one who has made a home-thrust.

‘Will you really?’ she said. ‘Good of you, I'm sure. I'll just run up and take my things

off. You'll have to see about laying the cloth. The housemaid is out, and Martha's in a temper. I noticed her sniffing as she opened the door. I suppose you can manage to do it between you. I sha'n't be very long,' and she ran upstairs.

The other two proceeded into the next room and set about the difficult operation of laying the cloth for supper. But Hollebhone was more hindrance than help, and at last he was told to leave it alone. He therefore established himself in a leaning attitude against the side-board, in such a position that she was bound to stumble over his feet every time she went past to put anything on the table. At last a detail of the arrangements caught his eye, and his face assumed an expression of annoyance.

'What are you laying for four for?' he asked. 'There are only three of us. You haven't been and invited anyone else, have you?'

'Only the girl who's got the floor above. She's a singer, and she's going on the tour with us, so we're bound to be a little chummy now, don't you see?'

'Well, but hasn't she got an old frump of a mother, no end of a nuisance?' asked Hollebhone, his face assuming longer and longer proportions.

'Oh, no, dear; her mother's gone to visit some friends in the country, and so we had to ask her down—you see, she's all alone.'

'Well, it's a dreadful bore. We shall have to be so dreadfully stiff with her in the room. Miss Tubbs is a jolly girl, and one can have

a lark with her, but this other one's sure to be a nuisance.'

Edith smiled.

'There, there,' she said, 'don't get in a rage about it. Now, I've finished the cloth, and we'll go into the next room and I'll tease you into a good temper. Come along.'

Hollebone did as he was told, protesting all the time, and he refused to stop for whatever she said. However, when they were once safely established, he in a chair and she on the hearth-rug at his feet, she adopted a commanding tone of voice.

'Now, stop grumbling at once, or I won't speak to you again this evening, and I insist on your telling me this instant why you came so late to-day.'

'Well, dear,' he said, 'I had meant to have come round this morning as it was your birthday, but Clarkson came in and kept me all the morning, and then old Professor Webb turned up just before lunch, and I had to entertain him all the afternoon, but I got rid of him as soon as I could.'

'But who is Clarkson?' she asked petulantly.

'Clarkson is my junior partner. You see, when my father died he left me the firm, but he said I was such a fool at business that I had better sleep, and so he made Clarkson junior partner. Clarkson was for a long time our head clerk, and my father knew he would be the best man to keep the business going. So he's the junior acting partner, and I'm the senior sleeping partner. Now you know all about it.'

‘I knew all that before. But what had Clarkson to say that kept you so long?’

‘Oh, nothing in particular, except that our business prospects are getting rather gloomy. Ever since the year before last—you remember when I went over to America?—oh, no, that was before we were engaged—well, that year the manager of our New York house appropriated some hundreds of thousands of dollars and bolted—Heaven only knows where. We never saw a penny of the money again. That was bad enough, but ever since then the house has been suffering a frightful series of losses from the bad weather. That fell upon the Liverpool branch—the underwriter’s side of the business, you know—and Clarkson says that very unpleasant rumours are circulated about us in the City, and our credit is getting rather shaky. However, it’s not so very bad as to be any great danger of ruin.’

‘Oh, you poor dear,’ said Edith, after she had heard him through. ‘I suppose you must be very much worried about it?’

‘Oh, it’s not so bad as all that,’ he said, with a laugh. ‘But, still, it might get so.’

‘At any rate you’ve got your chemical and medical knowledge to fall back upon, and if the worst comes to the worst you can set up as a doctor, and I can give music lessons.’

‘Well, I’m afraid you’d make a good deal more than I should. But I don’t think your parents would consent to let you marry me if I was a beggar.’

She rubbed her chin reflectively.

'No, I don't think they would *consent*, but I'd marry you in spite of them.'

'I'm afraid the law would have something to say to that, wouldn't it?'

'That is true. We should have to wait until I am of age at any rate—but then we are going to do that as it is, so it won't make much difference.'

'However, there's no need to think about that just now. Here comes Miss Tubbs.'

Miss Tubbs just put her head in at the door.

'Supper's ready, I say, you two. If you want anything to eat you'd better come in, unless you prefer to live on Love.'

'If you lived on the Love you get, Ju, you'd have a precious lean and hungry look, I can tell you.'

'Funny girl,' said Julia irrelevantly. 'I'm a little peckish.'

'Told you so. You've got the hungry look already, the leanness will come shortly. Come along, Clem, let's go in.'

When they were seated Hollebone said,—

'Where's Miss Wimple from upstairs? Aren't we going to wait for her?'

'Oh, Mr Hollebone, I'm shocked at you. Making inquiries about someone else to flirt with when you've got two of us already. Horrible! As it happens, Miss Wimple has got a bad headache and can't come down.'

Hollebone's face brightened visibly.

'Thank goodness for small mercies,' he ejaculated, but a postman's knock drowned his voice.

'Post, Ju,' said Edith; 'I'll get the letters first,' and a rush ensued for the door.

Who got the letters Hollebone did not see; but he heard ejaculations from outside, and presently they both came back.

'Here's pleasant news,' Edith said, displaying a letter. 'Our only man singer has gone and married our soprano, and they've gone off to America for the honeymoon—besides, the 'cellist has got the scarlet fever. That about stops our tour—doesn't it, Julia?' And Julia nodded.

'Quite right, too,' Hollebone said. 'I'm very glad. I'm sure you would have lost a great deal of money over it. Concerts like yours never pay.'

'You're a most unsympathetic boy,' said Edith, 'and I shall go off to Manchester to my father and mother to-morrow, and take Julia with me to stop for a month just to punish you. That'll be nice, won't it, Ju? We'll start the day after to-morrow.'

'I'm so glad,' said Hollebone. 'Now I shall be able to do a good month's work at last.'

'If I were you I should jilt him for uttering such rank heresy,' Julia said.

But Edith only smiled.

The rest of the meal passed off in alternate silence and storms of aggressive remarks from Miss Tubbs, but at its conclusion that young lady retired discreetly upstairs, saying that poor Miss Wimple was very dull and wanted reading to, and thus the field was left clear to the two in the drawing-room.

Conversation went on between them in low tones, occasionally broken into by short quarrels, but after a time it showed a disposition to lapse into gazing more or less sentimentally into the fire.

‘Won’t you play me something, Edie?’ Hollebhone said, rousing himself from a brown study.

‘Why, suttinly,’ she said. ‘I’d almost forgotten about your present. Shall I play solo, or call Julia down?’

‘Oh, play a solo, dear,’ he said.

She took up the violin as tenderly as if it were a baby, and having tuned it, began suddenly Tartini’s ‘Trillo del Diavolo.’ Hollebhone, as a rule, did not admire the violin as a solo instrument, nor did he, as a rule, admire diabolical music like the ‘Trillo,’ which was, indeed, inspired by a recollection on Tartini’s part of the Prince of Darkness’s own playing; but none of these considerations weighed with him on this occasion. He was in Heaven when he could watch the earnestness of her face as she bent her eyes down to the strings and swayed to and fro with the music.

‘I never knew Edith had so much character or determination in her face as she has to-night. As a rule, fair girls like her have not much force expressed in their faces, but it is the music that brings out her soul. Oh, how lovely she is!’ and he began to rhapsodise.

When she was nearly through, the door opened softly behind her, as she faced him,

and Miss Tubbs appeared. She seemed quite spellbound, and waited till the piece was finished in rapt astonishment.

'Why, Edith,' she said, as the player let the violin drop from her shoulder, smiling, 'I never heard you play so magnificently; your tone is really wonderful to-night.'

'It isn't my fault,' said Edith, her eyes almost sparkling with delight—limpid brown eyes seldom really flash. 'It's the fiddle—Clem's present—a real Strad.'

'Oh, is *that* all?' said Julia incredulously.

'No, but it is really a Strad. Isn't it, Clem?' she said, appealing to Hollebone. 'Look inside and you'll see the label; besides, you've only got to listen to the tone of it. That will tell you right off.'

Julia looked at Hollebone.

'Why, really,' she said, 'you must be either Monte Cristo or mad—or very much in love, which is worse than either.'

Hollebone smiled vaguely, hardly knowing whether the remark was intended as a compliment or the reverse.

'Play something else, Edie, and let Miss Tubbs accompany you—something soft—that little minuet of Brahms's; that'll sound lovely after the Diavolo thing.'

They complied with his request, and his delight was marred only by one thought, that it should ever come to an end. But it did.

'If I had anyone to give me presents like that,' said Miss Tubbs suddenly, 'I think I

should go mad with the excitement of wondering what the next thing would be.'

'But that isn't all he has given me,' Edith said suddenly.

'Good Lord! what is his other piece of folly?' said Miss Tubbs.

'Well, he has given me a bottle of a new poison that he's invented himself.'

Miss Tubbs cast an even greater glance of amazement at Hollebhone.

'But what on earth is Edie to do with it?' she asked him.

'Why, it has taken me five years to discover and mature it, and it is the strongest poison in the world, and I thought Edie would like to have it as a souvenir.'

'I know one thing it'll come in handy for,' said Edie, with a laughing glance at Hollebhone. 'It will do to kill my future husband if he ill-treats me.'

'After that I think I'd better leave,' said Hollebhone jocularly, as he rose to take his departure.

But Miss Tubbs shuddered.

'You shouldn't say that,' she said; 'one never knows what may happen.'

But Edith laughed.

'Come again to-morrow,' she said.

'Oh, I think I shall wait a year or two after that,' he said.


'Then I shall carry on a flirtation just to fill up the time.'

'Naughty girl,' he said, and vanished into the outer darkness.



CHAPTER II.

Es war ein alter König
Sein Herz war schwer, sein Haupt war grau.

N the morrow Edith started off early to do some shopping in preparation for her departure for Manchester on the following day. At her return she found awaiting her a note from Hollebone, running :—

‘DEAREST EDIE,—The irresistible Clarkson has just called, and insists on dragging me off to Liverpool. In the great storms of the last few nights several vessels wholly insured, besides others partly insured by us, have been lost. This, with the frightful runs of ill-luck we have lately had, makes matters very urgent, and Clarkson insists on my going with him at once. I will drop in on you in Manchester as soon as things begin to look a little straighter, which I hope will be almost immediately. I am in a frightful hurry, darling, so good-bye till then. (Enclosed is a description of the properties of my poison.)’

Edith dropped into a chair when she had read and re-read the letter.

‘Whatever shall we do if he is ruined—I’ll never give him up in any case. Father and mother will never consent, though. They can’t see that it’s better to marry for love than for money. I’m certain *they* never married for love. I don’t see how anyone could have fallen in love with a money-worshipper like papa, and mamma is very little better with her eternal matchmaking. I’m sure the way she has flung me at people’s heads is shocking, and before I’m past nineteen too. They’d never have sent me up to London to learn if they hadn’t hoped to catch somebody with me. Oh dear! oh dear! poor Clem, I hope he won’t be ruined. It will be such hard lines for him. I will set to work to see if I can’t make some money to help him afterwards, for I’m sure papa won’t give us a penny if I marry in spite of him. Yes, that’s it, I must make some money. I will wait until I hear definitely from him, and if he is ruined I will take to teaching as a profession, and see what I can do at that.’ And she went on building castles in the air, until Julia entered and cut short her train of thoughts.

They did not arrive at Manchester until towards seven on the following day. Mr and Mrs Ryland had gone to a conversazione at the Bishop’s, but this came like a respite to Edith, who had feared above all things that the report that Hollebone and Clarkson were in danger should have reached their ears. It was past eleven when they returned, and neither of them seemed to know anything

about the matter. Mr and Mrs Ryland greeted Miss Tubbs cordially, but by no means effusively, and having solemnly embraced their daughter, and expressed a hope that they had had a prosperous journey, announced their intention of proceeding at once to bed, as they were too much fatigued after the Bishop's party to converse with convenience on any subject whatever. With this arrangement both Edith and Miss Tubbs concurred, for to tell the truth there was but little sympathy between the Rylands and their daughter. Mr Ryland, being a cotton broker on a comfortable but by no means princely scale, had but little in common with his daughter, not that they were on bad terms by any means, but Mr Ryland's views, and indeed his wife's too, were bounded by money, or at least its attendant benefits, and they were both somewhat dismayed when their daughter evinced a determination to become a violinist, not an amateur but a regular professional. Now, the British merchant and his wife are accustomed to stigmatise violinists as 'fiddlers,' in a contemptuous way. When one says 'violinist' it has a high-sounding ring, a fiddler is quite another thing.

But of course one must remember that music is an Art, and its advocates are therefore looked down upon by followers of commerce, at least as far as Great Britain is concerned. There *may* be exceptions to this rule, but neither Mr nor Mrs Ryland were such *lusi naturæ*, and it was with feelings of dread that

they perceived their daughter's inclination. However, it had fallen about that Mr Ryland heard one day, by chance from a business acquaintance, of the enormous prices that the first-class violinists can command, and in his mind the differences between a good and a bad violinist was a consideration that existed only by the will of newspaper writers, therefore, considering it a settled thing that his daughter was to receive payments of some thousands of pounds nightly, he sent her to be taught by the most expensive teacher in Manchester, and sat down to await the time when the money was to begin pouring in ; but after she had learned some years he heard to his dismay, from her master, that it would be necessary to send her to London for several years to finish her musical education. Mr Ryland groaned inwardly at this prospect, but having made up his mind that his daughter *should* become a fiddler, he packed her off incontinently to London in spite of his wife's protests.

Mrs Ryland was perfectly sure that her daughter, having absurdly romantic ideas in her head, would get engaged to some beggarly scamp of a painter, and ruin all her ideas of a good match. However, in spite of the apprehensions of both Mr and Mrs Ryland, Edith prospered, for having not only great perseverance, but, in defiance of the laws of heredity, considerable natural gifts, she succeeded in carrying everything before her in the way of musical study, and found herself

after two years' time in a position to almost earn her living by teaching, besides which, the concerts she gave were always well attended, though that was perhaps due largely to the fact that Hollebhone, to whom she had meanwhile become engaged, bought and distributed among his friends rows upon rows of stalls.

Hollebone was, in even Mrs Ryland's ideas, a most eligible *parti*, with his income that ran well into five figures, his studiousness and economy, and his general mildness of character, which, Mrs Ryland thought, boded well for her own prospects as a mother-in-law. Nothing would convince her that her daughter really cared for Hollebhone in the least, so much so that she even wrote to her to compliment her on her astuteness in securing so desirable a young man in so short a time; but she received a letter in reply from Edith so hotly written that it actually shocked her, and Mrs Ryland was a person who rarely took the trouble to be shocked at anything. However, she did not allow herself to be much distressed by the strong-mindedness, as she called it, of her daughter, being indeed too much delighted at the circumstances that called it forth.

Mr Ryland himself was delighted at his daughter's engagement for many reasons, nevertheless he stipulated that the marriage should not come off until his daughter was of age, she being then nineteen and Hollebhone twenty-four. Thus it was that matters stood in the Rylands' household.

Close on a week passed by without a word from Hollebone, and Edith was beginning to fret seriously, until one evening, by the last post, a letter came from him, running thus:—

‘DEAREST EDIE,—I write to you to break you the news that must come to your ears sooner or later. Clarkson and I have been going over the books throughout the whole of last week, and do what we may the house will fail to-morrow for about £398,000, of which we shall only be able to pay some £200,000. This leaves £198,000 of clear debt. I have, however, the sum of £200,000 under the trustees of my uncle, which will not come to me for a year and six months’ time, until, indeed, I am twenty-six years of age. This £200,000 will just cover the debt. We are bound to be declared bankrupt before that time, for our affairs are by no means complicated, and our creditors will have no legal claims on the trust-money. I, therefore, am on the horns of a dilemma as to whether, on the one hand, I shall jeopardise my honour and not pay away the £200,000 when it becomes due, or, on the other hand, whether I shall plunge you into poverty in the future by paying away the trust-money to retrieve my honour. I, of course, release you from every promise you gave me before this disaster, but, from what I know of your character, do not believe you will give me up, and I therefore leave it for you to decide whether I shall pay my debts or not. You must forgive me, my dearest, if

my letter seem cold and formal, but I do not wish to influence your decision as to giving me up or no, and my love for you is, and will always be, unchanged. I would like to write you a great deal more, but it would not be honourable in me to influence you in any way—But believe me to be ever your own,

‘CLEMENT HOLLEBONE.’

Edith let the letter fall from her hands, with a laugh. Never having known what it was to want for a penny, she had not the slightest idea of what poverty is. She had an idea that it was a struggle, and that one would have to put one's shoulder to the wheel; but these are easy terms, and slip glibly off the tongue, leaving no idea of what a weary long time the struggle lasts. Viewed in the abstract and as a word, ‘poverty’ has quite a glamour about it, and riches somehow seem sordid, but to *be* poor is quite another thing—quite. Edith, however, had got her ideas of poverty from books, and in books ninety-five per cent. of the poor people struggle out of their poverty—and when one reads the other five per cent, one either does not finish them, or else one attempts to efface the remembrance of them at once. Moreover Edith had imbibed notions of honour which the present occasion seemed to be a fitting opportunity to put into practice, and she forthwith answered Hollebhone's letter with another glowing with sentiments of the most exalted kind, and at the same time

brimming over with love, painting the future in the very brightest of reds and golds. And thus the bad news seemed to have an effect rather exhilarating, than the reverse, on her spirits. Nevertheless she felt very nervous over the contest that the news of her lover's ruin would occasion between her and her parents, and it was with inward trepidation that she went downstairs to dinner; but it was evident that no inkling of the facts had reached her parents. The dinner was as dull as ever.

Mr Ryland, whose ideas were swallowed up entirely by the financial columns of the newspaper, hardly spoke at all, except to abuse the soup at the beginning of the meal. About the same time he made some platitudinal remarks about the weather to Miss Tubbs, whom he wished to honour, after which he subsided into portentous silence. For Mr Ryland did not consider that women should have any ideas on politics, and his usual prandial conversation was limited to vague abuse of Mr Gladstone and Free Trade, that is, whilst he was with members of his own sex—among ladies he maintained a rigorous taciturnity.

Mrs Ryland, on the other hand, kept up a vigorous flow of conversation all by herself, to which Miss Tubbs lent a respectful attention. Mrs Ryland was well informed about every nothing that took place in this world, from the colour of the Duchess of Sandhurst's last new dress to the ailments of their own kitchen cat. She even went so far as to

consider that she had a sort of proprietary interest in music, on the strength of her daughter's prowess in that art, but she was very careful never to air her ideas before Julia, though she did sometimes address her daughter on the subject.

Edith passed the night in a state of excitement that even her philosophy could not subdue, but in the morning at breakfast Mr Ryland still knew nothing about the all-important news. He announced his intention of bringing home with him to dinner his most important customer, Mr Kasker-Ryves, the great retail general merchant, who had shops all over the kingdom.

'You must be very attentive to him,' he said to his wife, 'for he is by far the best customer I have, and as he is on the point of making large purchases I am anxious to please him as much as possible.'

A wish of Mr Ryland's was unquestionable law in his household, for, quiet as he was, he insisted on being obeyed, with a firmness that quite overcame his wife, and even Edith.

Therefore Mrs Ryland made extraordinary efforts to improvise a splendid repast in honour of Mr Kasker-Ryves, for he was an old man; and as Mrs Ryland had a theory, more or less correct, that the only way to reach the heart of an old man is through his stomach, she engaged herself busily in the kitchen, superintending the making of certain dishes, and even in putting the finishing touches with her own hands to others.

Thus one may judge of her despair, when at the very heat of the work, when the success or non-success of one of her masterpieces was trembling in the balance, a servant came running down to say that the master had just come home and wished to see her in the library at once, without a moment's delay. All flushed as she was from the heat of the fire, and with her hands still soiled with particles of flour and suet, Mrs Ryland ran upstairs.

Mr Ryland and Edith were already there, and he, standing with his back to the fire, began an once, without even clearing his throat,—

'I have just received a telegram from Liverpool to say that "Hollebone & Clarkson" have failed for £400,000, of which it is supposed they will pay about half. This is very serious; but what makes matters worse, young Hollebone has, it seems, made over the reversion of the £200,000 left him in trust under his uncle's will. Sudden and regrettable as this occurrence must needs seem'—Mr Ryland always spoke like a book on occasions when he had time to round off his sentences beforehand—'there can be no doubts in your minds as to the course to be pursued, for I cannot allow my daughter to marry a beggar. I myself, indeed, am not sufficiently rich to afford a pittance large enough to support a second family. Mr Hollebone called on me this morning to state his prospects to me, and without hesitation I have broken off the engagement, and have promised, in my

daughter's name, that she would write him a formal letter breaking it off on her part. I, of course, offered to return any presents he may have made, but he declined the offer in a manner that certainly did him credit, and I did not see fit to press the matter. As it is as well to get rid of these details as soon as possible, you had better, Edith, sit down at once at the writing-table and write to Mr Hollebone. If you do not feel sufficiently confident in your own powers of epistolary composition, I will dictate a suitable letter.'

Poor Mrs Ryland, utterly powerless with the terrible news that had brought down so suddenly her castle of matrimonial and social success, could not collect her thoughts sufficiently to give them utterance; but, much in the same way as a drowning man counts the stars that shoot across his darkening eyes, she could not help noticing how pale Edith became, and how tightly her lips were pressed together, and knowing her nature to a certain extent, imagined that she would refuse to throw over her lover in so spiritless a manner. But, to her surprise, Edith walked over, without a word, to the writing-table, and taking pen and ink, began to write as calmly as if she were writing an invitation to lunch.

'I should begin,' said Mr Ryland, taking one of his hands from under his coat tails, 'Dear Mr Hollebone—My father having—'

But Edith interrupted him. Neither her father nor mother recognised her voice.

‘Thank you, father, I will write the letter my own way, if you please.’

Mr Ryland, always scrupulously polite, accepted her amendment, and put his hand once more behind his coat tails, having no further need of its assistance in accentuating his rhetorical effusion thus untimely cut short. For some moments there was silence, as the pen scratched its way remorselessly over the paper. Mrs Ryland was still too paralysed to speak, and indeed, even when she was able to think, she did not at the moment see her way to saying anything, for as a rule Mrs Ryland was a person of few words.

The scratching of the pen ceased, and Edith handed the paper to her father, and then, turning round in her chair, waited as he read it, driving her pen nervously into the blotting-paper the while. Mr Ryland put on his gold-rimmed glasses and began to read the letter. Even as he read the first word his eyelids rose in surprise, but nevertheless he held his peace and read on. When his eyes had travelled down the page once, he tapped the paper with his finger-nail impatiently and looked at his daughter. Mr Ryland, as a rule, in his family life had invariably driven everything before him, even when he had come in contact with the submissive obstinacy of his child. But his eyes, which were magnetically drawn to his daughter’s, perceived such a look in them that he knew that unless he made an effort his power was over. For there is an expression of smouldering fire that comes on

occasion even into green-brown eyes, and in them it is more impressive than in dark eyes, for the very reason that it comes so seldom. Mr Ryland, who was a man that did nothing without deliberation, laid the letter down on the writing-table and took out his watch. He cleared his throat.

‘I had not anticipated,’ he began, ‘any opposition to my wishes from you, Edith, for even Mr Hollebone was reasonable enough to see the impropriety of forcing you to comply with your engagement, and of dragging you, with himself, into a state of beggary, but as it is, I say you shall not, and I repeat it. You *shall* not marry him so long as I have any power in the matter. Of course after my authority over you expires you will be at liberty legally to pursue what course you like, but I forbid *my daughter* to marry Mr Hollebone—when, and if she does so, she ceases to be my child.’

And with this ‘Dixi’ Mr Ryland shut the case of his watch, and putting it back in his pocket, turned to Mrs Ryland.

‘It is time to go up and dress for dinner. Mr Kasker-Ryves will be coming very shortly, and it is important that we should receive him as well as possible,’ and he walked out of the room; but before the door closed he turned back and said, ‘Oh, by-the-bye, I meant to say that Mr Ryves is going to bring his son to dinner. I quite forgot it until this minute,’ and he retired once more.

This was, as it were, the last straw to poor Mrs Ryland's mental back.

'Oh, good gracious,' she said, 'isn't it enough that we've got the old man coming to dinner, but he must needs bring his son too, and quite unexpectedly, and at such a time, and—it's all your fault, Edith. Why didn't you have young Blackburn when he proposed? or there was Salmon, or Danecourt—you might have had them all three—and what have you written in this letter to annoy your father so?'

Mrs Ryland advanced to the table, seized the letter, and read aloud,—

'DEAREST CLEM,—They have just found out at home that you are ruined, and they want to make me give you up, but I will never do so—never—and I will just wait until I can marry you in spite of them.'

But Mrs Ryland lost her patience here, and even began to cry hysterically,—

'What *have* I done?' she said. 'What *have* I done to have such a daughter? Oh dear! oh dear!' But seeing that Edith made no reply, and only sat looking with a far-away expression at the fire, she gave up the struggle and left the room, with a carriage indicative at once of grief, contempt, and aggrieved maternity. But Edith sat and smiled at the fire. It was a difficult thing for her to realise if she felt glad or sorry at the turn affairs had taken; but for a moment she felt exultant tinglings in her veins, as is the way with one

who has just carried the day against an obstinate opponent. But we have it on the primal authority of Plato that nothing in Nature takes place without a reaction ensuing, and with Edith reaction came with afterthought. She, with hands pressing against her chin, and eyes gazing moodily at the fire, mused thus. Be it understood that, since she had received the letter on the night before from Hollebhone, she had been in a state of enthusiasm for a love-in-a-cottage existence, and indeed she had almost come to the conclusion that his having been ruined was rather a benefit than otherwise. To the interview with her father she had looked forward with indifference, for she foresaw well what would take place therein, and she had inherited, and even in a concentrated degree, her father's determination of character, so that she feared him even less than he did her.

'I have determined, that come what may, I will make money—not a little money, but heaps and heaps, by hook and by crook, so that when I am of age and can marry Clem I shall not make him poorer than he is. Not that I mind his being ruined,' she added, sticking obstinately to the 'loaf of bread with contentment' that she had taken as her standard of beatitude.

She was very young, remember, and was not even mentally precocious enough to have reached that stage in the psychological career when one begins for a time to be pessimistic, doubting that one possesses a genius for one's

art ; and never having had any necessity to earn money, or, rather, to keep herself by the money she earned, she looked upon the earning of it as a very minor obstacular detail in the road to her becoming a millionairess, the admired of the World, and raising ' her Clem ' to affluence.

Conceit is rather a hard word to apply to this overweening self-reliance of untried youth—call it rather inexperience and vagueness of ideas. However, in spite of that, although she looked upon her fiddle and her art as the most probable means of earning fortune, she was not *altogether* oblivious of the fact that with even her talents there might be considerable obstacles to her achieving fabulous riches with very little exertion. But she dismissed every doubt from her mind at the thought of the happiness that would ensue to her in the Great Hereafter, and of the happiness it would give Clem, for Clem was always uppermost in her dreams, and her whole life had been one long dream hitherto. The rough awakening must come sooner or later ; but I do not hold that sorrows seem the harder by the contrast, for if a man's youth is wilted and warped, God preserve him from an old age—for how will he do without the remembrance of secret, hot, young joys that he can croon over to warm himself on the cold journey as he nears the Shadowland.

But Edith ran lightly upstairs to dress for dinner.

Before she had quite finished her toilet the

Kasker-Ryves, father and son, had arrived, and when she came down to the drawing-room the dinner had just been announced.

Mr Kasker-Ryves, senior, had been engaged in a dissertation on the merits of samples of cotton in the raw that he had seen at Mr Ryland's mills the day before, and he hardly desisted from it when Edith was introduced to him. Mrs Ryland, Julia Tubbs, and the young man were standing together at the other end of the room, but the general exodus that the announcement of dinner caused rendered it impossible that Edith should form an opinion as to the appearance of either father or son.

The position of the seats at the table had a great effect on the future history of Edith. They were arranged thus—Edith sat facing Ryves *filis*, on her right hand was Ryves the father, on the left of young Ryves was Julia, whilst Mr Ryland was near the father, and Mrs Ryland had the son at her left hand.

During the pause that ensued the moment after they were seated, Edith had shot a quick glance, first at her father and then her mother, to see how they looked after the occurrence in the study, and she could not help confessing to herself an admiration for the wonderful way her father bore himself. Although she well knew her father to be a handsome man, it seemed to her that she had never known him look so positively magnificent as he did that night. His finely cut features and peaked beard, bravely grizzled,

that it showed well against his florid face, gave him more the appearance of a poet than of a business man; moreover, his eyes were dark and piercing, fitted rather for foretelling the rise and fall of the passions than of stocks and shares. As to her mother, the old air of nonchalant languor lay on her face, and formed a mask to her emotions more opaque than wax.

The dinner began, and as no one addressed her for a moment or two, she had liberty to steal glances at the visitors. The first thing that struck her was the great similarity between father and son, which would indeed have been almost ludicrously striking had it not been that the old man's hair was white already; but there was one difference that Edith, however, was not able to note, namely, that whereas the older man was handsome, seen from any point, the younger could only produce a favourable impression when seen from the front and right-hand side. Owing to a habitual miscalculation in the parting of his hair, the natural, devilish hardness of heart and overbearingness of spirit were visible in the disproportionately large size and pointed, forward thrust of the nose. Edith therefore read in the face of the blonde young man opposite her 'Nobleness of thought.' Julia, on the left of him, read 'Innate and unconquerable selfishness.' Now there was nothing in the left-hand view of the father that could detract from the opinion that he was the most amiable and lovable of septuagenarians, who combined in himself all the airs of 'grand

seigneur' with the bluff heartiness of a fine old English gentleman.

First impressions carried the day with both Edith and Julia, for Edith was sufficiently simple to be guided by outward appearance, and Julia was sufficiently penetrating to be a very good disciple of Lavater.

Therefore Edith took a liking to the son, and fell right away in love with the father, after the fashion of young girls with well-preserved old men of seventy, or thereabouts, for Mr Ryves' precise age was known to nobody.

Julia was much neglected during the progress of dinner, for Mrs Ryland monopolised the whole of the conversation and the attention of the young Kasker-Ryves at her end of the table, and old Mr Ryves divided himself in a most wonderful way, seeming at one and at the same moment to keep up an incomprehensible financial conversation with Mr Ryland and to be narrating small pithy anecdotes and paying the most outrageously personal compliments to Edith, which Edith received as graciously as was possible.

One of those sudden lulls, inevitable in all conversations, interrupted the flow of soul, and the clink of dishes outside the door became painfully audible. Julia began to wonder who would speak first, when suddenly Mr Ryves broke the silence, shaking his head mournfully.

'I was very sorry to hear of the failure of Hollebone this morning, more especially as the late Mr Hollebone was a particular business friend of mine. I have met his

son once or twice, and have always found him a very pleasant young fellow. Perhaps a trifle too abstracted for a business man.'

Mr Ryland raised his eyebrows and shot a glance at his daughter.

'Abstractedness and idealism are hardly good qualities in anyone, business man or not,' he said slowly.

Julia ground her teeth.

'A man who can torture his daughter like that,' she said to herself, 'is only fit to be a Chief Inquisitioner, or to be hung.'

Edith's head was bent over her plate.

'That is rather a hard dictum,' said Mr Kasker-Ryves softly.

'I certainly consider young Hollebone's signing away his private fortune to pay his business debts a piece of the most unpardonable and quixotic honesty,' Mr Ryland retorted, enclosing the point of his beard with his hand.

'There I must needs find myself at issue with you, Mr Ryland,' said Mr Ryves, raising his voice. 'I consider it a most noble and praiseworthy action, for, apart from the fact that the payment of debts must be a *sine quâ non* to an honest man, when you come to consider the fact that the clients of Hollebone's banking and insurance business are largely constituted of poor people who would starve if their little all were suddenly snatched from them—'

'Oh, confound the poor,' said Mr Ryland, smiling, out of patience. 'If every business

man were to take the bread out of his own mouth to stuff it into the mouths of the poor the country would become a greater hell upon earth than it is at present.'

'My dear sir,' said Mr Kasker-Ryves, with a marvellous expression of horror on his face, '*how can* you, as an employer of labour, talk in this heartless way of the working man who put the bread into your and my mouth? No, say what you will, I consider it a magnificent action on young Hollebone's part.'

('I really don't know which is the greater scoundrel, in his way, the man who despises his fellow-men so shamefully or that old wretch who, whilst notoriously sweating hundreds of his employees to death, professes these noble sentiments, which, by-the-bye, poor little Edie is drinking in with might and main.' This aside from Julia.)

A pause had fallen on the conversation at Mr Ryland's end, and his wife, whose nerves had been unable to bear the strain of listening to the Hollebone controversy, and who had therefore plunged into a desperate conversation with the young man, said loudly to him,—

'Well, you may say what you like about Miss Aubrey, but I like her. She's amusing. She talks about the tricks of their dog—and then she *is* clever, you know.'

The young man said 'Ye-es' very dubiously.

Mrs Ryland went on.

'I like a person, now, who talks a lot—like

her, you know, so that I don't have to think and talk myself.'

The young man said 'Ye-es' even more dubiously at this, and flushed a good deal.

His father burst in suddenly, jovially.

'Don't you think you're a little hard on my son, Mrs Ryland, considering that he hasn't spoken more than two words during the dinner?'

Mrs Ryland looked slightly uncomfortable.

'Still waters run deep,' she said, with an uneasy laugh.

'Ay, they do that,' answered the old man. 'And for all Jemmy's so quiet he's deuced sharp, and one of these days you'll find yourself immortalised in a magazine story. Hey, Jemmy?'

His son blushed.

'What, do you really write, Mr Kasker-Ryves?' said Mrs Ryland. 'How *very* nice.'

Mr Ryves, senior, broke in again.

'Yes, Jemmy does write. He's got quite a name. Did you never read one of his books? What was the last one called? *The—The—*oh, confound it, I shall forget my own name next'—he sighed ponderously—'my memory's going horribly. But what can one expect when one is nearly eighty. I used to think when I was young that it would be a fine thing to command millions of money, but now I can do it it doesn't seem so very much. I'd give it all to be twenty-five once more for a couple of years. One feels a little bad at times—all alone on the borders

of Shadowland. I haven't a friend left in the world. They all died years ago, and I've outlived my time. The doctor told me only the other day that I must not expect to live more than two years at the most.'

'Oh, what nonsense!' said Mrs Ryland hastily. 'You've got *years* to live.'

'What a consummate actor the man is!' thought Julia to herself. 'Only, I can't see his object, unless'—and an idea formed itself in her brain.

Mr Ryves sighed more deeply than ever.

'God forbid that my life should be prolonged much. I look for death as a happy release. It is frightful to be all alone in the world as I am.'

Edith sighed to herself out of sympathy, thinking on her own hard case. An idea flashed through her mind—an idea something like Julia's—but she suppressed it instantly. Just then the dinner came to an end, Mrs Ryland giving the signal for the ladies to rise. Once in the drawing-room Edith managed to sustain herself until her mother, feeling indescribably awkward, left the room. The reaction came then, and unable to keep up longer, she sat down on a sofa, and burying her face in the cushions, burst into a passion of tears.

Julia came softly to her, and putting her arms soothingly round her, drew her face gently towards her own, with a tenderness more than maternal, until Edith threw her arms round her neck and sobbed tumultu-

ously. Her heart had been aching for a little sympathy, and neither father nor mother had it to give. After a time her crying ceased, and she drew herself away.

‘Oh dear, Ju,’ she said, half laughing through her tears, ‘I don’t know how I can be so stupid, but I do feel very wretched, and everyone is so hard.’

‘You poor little dear,’ Julia said, half pityingly, half jealously. ‘Why don’t you tell me of your troubles? I could have shared them with you—as it is I can guess it all—but I might have helped you a little, if it were only with advice. Then, of course, there was that business of his signing away his private fortune. Naturally he wrote to you before he did so, asking your permission, and giving you leave to break off the engagement if you liked, and just as naturally you write back a gushing letter saying that “honesty is the best policy,” in copy-book letters, and that you will never, never, never, never give him up, and then he goes and makes a formal sort of post-obit of *all* his trust-money, which just suffices to cover his debts, instead of reserving a few thousand pounds, which would only have taken a couple of shillings or so out of the pockets of each of his creditors. That all comes from your scandalous precipitation. What do you intend to do now? I, of course, understand that you will never give him up, and that you will marry him when you have attained your majority, and all that sort of thing, but how do you intend to live now you are both

absolutely without a penny? For there can be no expectation of ever getting anything from your father if you marry without his consent. You see how fully I take everything in at a glance. Well, and what do you intend to do now, dear?’

Edith was quite taken aback at the penetration of Julia. It seemed as if her friend were coming out in a new light.

‘I don’t exactly know what I intend to do, but I mean to set to work at once and earn a lot of money—somehow—so that Clem will not be any poorer than he is now, don’t you see. Besides that, Clem is going to get the assistant professorship of chemistry from Professor Webb, when the present one leaves, and even if he doesn’t, he’s an M.D. besides, and he will set up as a doctor somewhere in the country. Oh, we shall get on somehow. Besides, I’m going to get a lot of money.’

‘How?’ asked Julia cynically.

Edith blushed.

‘I don’t exactly know *how*,’ she said. ‘I thought by my—by teaching, that is.’

‘No, you didn’t,’ said Julia. ‘You meant to become a sort of female Paganini—not to mention Neruda—all at once, I know, and even if you give lessons you won’t make money enough to keep yourself let alone him. Look at me now, I’ve been at it seven years, hard work all the time, and it was only last year that I became independent, and you haven’t got the patience to teach well. Take my word for it, there’s no money to be made

by art in this country unless one's a society portrait painter or a spooney ballad writer, I know. The only way *to* make money now-a-days is to be a Jew or a butter merchant. That is looking at the matter broadly, and taking a Jew as a type of a banker and money-lender, and a butter merchant as any sort of a merchant who is oily enough and rascal enough to succeed, don't you know, like old what's-his-name in the next room !'

'Now I won't have you abuse Mr Ryves,' said Edith. 'He's a dear old man. Look at how he stood up for Clem when no one else did.'

'Yes, dear, he's a splendid actor, and when a man's made a large fortune by general swindling and roguery he gets dreadfully moral in his old age, especially when he's got a great deal more money than he well knows what to do with.'

'Well, but Ju,' said Edith, pouting, 'you've said a great deal to discourage me. Can't you make a suggestion as to how I can make money?'

'Why, of course I can, dear,' Julia answered. 'As a general rule the only way for a girl to get money now, just as it always was, that is if she wants lots of it, is to marry for money, or at least to "goa where money be's."'

Edith shook her head without deigning to answer.

'I don't mean to insult you by thinking that you would marry for money,' Julia went on. 'But you've got a good chance, if you work your

cards well, of being adopted by old Mr Kasker-Ryves, and then he's sure to die pretty soon, and he might leave you a few odd hundred thousand, don't you see.'

Edith blushed, guiltily one might almost have thought.

'You really are too mean, Ju,' she said angrily, 'to tease me so.'

But Julia took no notice of her indignation.

'Of course one has a natural repugnance to marrying for money, and that sort of thing, but I can't suggest any other way just at present. I am rather superstitious, you know, dear. Did you ever hear of the "*sortes Vergilianae*."'

Edith nodded.

'Well, I believe in them implicitly. I suppose there isn't a Virgil in the room. A Bible, or even a Shakespeare would do as well. Yes, there's a Shakespeare on the table. Well, just open it, and I'll stick my finger on a line, and you can read it. It's sure to be of material use in guiding you to a way of making money. That is, if you won't accept the advice I have already given you. It's too mean for you, I suppose.'

Edith fetched the Shakespeare, and when she had opened it Julia pointed at a line.

'Now read it,' she said, and Edith read :

And he, that stands upon a slippery place,
Makes nice of no vile hold to stay him up.

'It seems to me to be quite senseless.'

'Does it?' said Julia meaningly; but seeing

the tears rolling into Edith's eyes, she added quickly, 'But Edie, dear, you mustn't mind my teasing—something's sure to turn up. Mr Hollebone is sure to succeed yet, he's so clever. You really mustn't mind what I said. I am a beast, but you always seemed so selfishly happy together, when I was so lonely, that I couldn't help annoying you, and so when I saw you were down I wanted to crow over you like the cad I am. Forgive me, won't you, dear?'

Edith was just saying, 'Of course I will, Ju,' when the noise of voices coming from the direction of the dining-room announced that the gentlemen were joining the ladies.

Julia gave a sigh.

'Now we must turn into a sort of human "dead sea apples" once more, I suppose.'

But Edith said,—

'Well, for my part, I almost want a little cheerful conversation to enliven me, I feel so dreadfully down in the dumps.'

'"Alarums, excursions, enter the king," as Shakespeare says,' added Julia.





CHAPTER III.

Der arme, alte Koenig
Er nahm ein junge Frau.



MR KASKER-RYVES called on Mr Ryland at his office on the morrow, and mentioned in the course of business conversation that he was not feeling well enough to return to London at once, as he had intended, but that he must stop for some time longer and rest in Manchester.

Mr Ryland was distracted at hearing that his distinguished customer was not in the best of health, though rejoicing to hear that he was to have the pleasure of Mr Ryves's proximity for some time more.

Mr Ryland saw here an opening for securing the whole custom of Mr Ryves, and meant to do his best to gain it by cordiality of sentiments. His wife was even more far-sighted, and persuaded her husband to invite the old man to reside with them whilst he should be in Manchester, for by this means he would be more under their influence. She added, as an after-thought, that they might as well extend their invitation to the son also. Mrs

Ryland had an eye to the future in more ways than one, and did not see that a chance, however remote, of allying oneself to the inheritance of a couple of millions was a thing to be sneezed at by any means, but she never, no she *never* did mean, as she said afterwards, that that Tubbs girl should throw herself at the head of the young man and drag him away as she did do.

It was a fact, too, for which Edith could in no wise account, that Julia *did* lay herself out to please the young man in a most barefaced manner; but somehow or other, by a skilful turn at the end of every passage with him, she contrived to make him look terribly ridiculous, though, strange to say, each such rebuff only rendered him more pertinacious. Edith even could not refrain from twitting her friend on the subject of the '*vile hold*,' but Julia only smiled placidly and said, 'Yes, dear, I'm forestalling you, don't you know,' which seemed very unlikely to Edith.

At anyrate the matter excited general attention, and it must be confessed pretty general surprise, when the young man, who had found that important business necessitated his return to London on the same day that Julia went, was found to be tearing his hair and swearing violently at her declining to see him any more after they had reached the metropolis.

But Julia only laughed when a letter came from Edith to her reproving her for her conduct.

‘Did you ever,’ she answered in her next, ‘hear of a useful but unostentatious official in the Spanish bull-fights whose business is to decoy superfluous beasts out of the arena by waving a red rag in front of them and nimbly eluding their onset?’

As a matter of fact there is no official answering exactly to that description, but Edith understood the metaphor and was grateful.

She had bitterly lamented her friend’s departure, but Miss Tubbs was not able to afford risking the loss of any of her lessons by a longer stay in Manchester, and Edith’s parents refused to let her go back to London before she had fulfilled certain social engagements which had been booked for some months in advance, for Mrs Ryland still felt very sore over Julia’s abduction of young Ryves.

As to the old man, Fate, who always has a finger in every pie, provided that numerous small chronic ailments would attack him just before a premeditated departure to London, so that he stayed on and stayed on—Mrs Ryland had no objection to this course, as she thought it possible that the father’s remaining at the house might bring the errant prodigal back—besides which, Mr Ryves was simple in his mode of living, for his health’s sake, and therefore was not a very important item in the house expenses, besides which, an idea struck her, which even she, despite her ruling passion, was hardly wicked

enough to entertain for more than a moment as it were with bated thought-breath.

To do Mr Ryland justice, if the idea had ever come near him, he would have had not the slightest compunction about giving Mr Ryves 'notice to quit,' with as much politeness as was compatible with forcibleness. For he was, at least, an upright man, after his lights, and would have abhorred sacrificing his flesh and blood even for two millions odd. But unfortunately he had not sufficient penetration to foresee anything so improbable.

Did you ever happen to see a very old man fall in love with a very beautiful young girl? It is a decidedly ludicrous sight, if one can for a moment lay aside the horror which the incongruity of it inspires. As a general rule, the symptoms are exactly those of calf-love in a very unlicked cub or hobbledehoy. The older and more senile the old man, even as the younger and more unlicked the cub, the more violent are his transports. As a general rule a girl with a well-regulated mind can get rid of both cub and old man with equal ease, though an old man is more dangerous if he has a pretty large supply of filthy lucre. By-the-bye, did you ever hear the one pun of the Corsican parvenu, or conqueror? To the best of my knowledge it is the only one he ever made, but in my opinion, as a play on words, it was his Marengo, Austerlitz, and Jena rolled into one, because it was his only one. To give it as shortly as possible, he remarked of a young and beautiful lady of his court,

who was engaged to an old and monstrously hideous nobleman, who had, however, unlimited *cadeaux* at his command: '*Le présent fait oublier le futur,*' which is very remarkable as a piece of royal and double *double-entendre*, but unfortunately it will not bear being Englished.

Now if you will substitute for '*le futur*' of the above-mentioned pun a remarkably noble-looking, white-haired old gentleman, with a smile of overpowering sweetness, who is in possession of unlimited riches, and is in need of a companion to soothe the last days of his declining path in life, and for the court lady a penniless young girl, who is passionately in love with a penniless young man, and feels a genuine compassion for the lonely state of the old man. She argues in this way,—

'While the old man lives, I will never see my lover, nor even think of him, but I will comfort and cheer the old man in his loneliness, and will smooth the way to the grave for him. In this way I shall tide over the time during which I should not in any case be able to marry my true love—and then, perhaps, for my faithful handmaidenship the old man will leave me a little money on which I may live with my love, after I have served well for it.'

Make allowances that the girl is very young, very wretched, headstrong, and inexperienced, deprived of counsel from all those from whom it should come. She lies awake

and thinks all night, and broods all day over the possibilities and rights and wrongs of the case, until by long thought and internal arguments, without counter-arguments, the wrongs are all obliterated, and the case stands out as a glowing piece of virtue and self-sacrifice.

Argue about it as one will, however, it remains a marriage '*de convenance*,' and such marriages are monstrosities, doubtless, but still it seems to me that from the point of view at which she looked at it the girl was committing a crime capable of palliation.

It is needless to say that the persons hinted at in this prolix '*Apologia*' are Edith and Mr Kasker-Ryves the elder. If you are sentimental you will shudder and feel righteously horror-struck at the turn of affairs, if practical you will say, 'H'm, a very proper arrangement under the circumstances.'

It came thus about that one morning Mr and Mrs Ryland were wonder-struck by Mr Ryves formally proposing for the hand of their daughter, and saying that that young lady for her part was willing to accept the offer of his heart and hand.

Three months had by that time elapsed since the day on which Hollebhone had announced the failure of his firm. From that time Edith had received few letters from him, and they had all been to the same purpose, namely, that the affairs of the firm took longer to wind up than had seemed possible, on account of the peculations of their New York

manager, which had taken place two years before ; but in any case there could be no doubt that utter commercial ruin, if not starvation, was staring him in the face, that his love for Edith was unchanged, but that he gave her her freedom, as far as he had control over her, from her promises—and so forth. To which letters it is unnecessary to give her answers. Thus three months had passed.

But to return to her parents. Their surprise was even the greater at Mr Ryves's announcement, inasmuch as Edith had steadfastly refused, in spite of her father's commands and her mother's entreaties to write to Hollebone and give him his *congé*. Therefore they almost thought that Mr Ryves must have been momentarily bereft of his senses when he asked their sanction, and they demanded time to consider the matter. This seemed to Mr Ryves to be most irrational, for he regarded his millions at their true worth as arguments. But Mr and Mrs Ryland were inexorable ; at least the husband supplied the inexorability, and Mrs Ryland maintained a discreet and unmoved silence, in spite of the fretting and fuming of Mr Ryves. To do Mr Ryland justice, he regarded the proceeding with the utmost repugnance, and even went so far as to argue with his daughter seriously on the subject, to the horror of his wife, who thought that Edith had come out far in advance of herself as a matrimonial strategist, but she did not feel jealous of that.

Edith, however, was steadfast in her resolve,

much to the joy of her mother, and, it must be confessed, to the satisfaction of her father, who was only too glad to see his daughter so well settled in life.

Therefore he made no objections to the marriage taking place as soon as possible, by special licence, though Mrs Ryland would have been glad to have had a largely attended ceremony. She consoled herself, however, with the reflection that the sooner the marriage was clenched the better, for 'there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip,' as she had experienced already in the case of Hollebone, besides which, Mr Ryves was a remarkably fragile specimen of a cup, and might break with even so little a shock as a contradiction to his wishes. Therefore she persuaded her husband to allow the marriage to be got over without any ceremony whatever. Mr Ryland therefore gave in before the pressure brought to bear upon him. The jointure he gave Edith was £10,000, and Mr Ryves settled £80,000 on her, with which Mrs Ryland had need to be satisfied, though she would have liked to stick out for a quarter of a million. But the old man had a violent love for his son, and he made no secret of the fact that he refused to deprive him of a larger share of the fortune he had managed to amass, and for which he had striven with might and main, in order to enrich his son. Therefore Mrs Ryland must needs be content.

Edith insisted on sending to London for Julia to act as her bridesmaid. It was the

only thing she did insist on, and although Mrs Ryland had conceived a violent dislike to that young lady, she found herself in her turn outweighed. Therefore Julia was sent for, and came in hot haste two days before the marriage took place. Almost coincident with her arrival came a letter from Hollebhone to say that the affairs of Hollebhone & Company were on the point of being definitely settled in a few days, but in the meantime, having no hope of anything to come from that source, he had taken the opportunity of looking about for a practice where he could settle down as a doctor until Professor Webb could see his way to giving him his prospective post, or until something definite turned up. The letter was pitched in a more hopeful key than any of its predecessors, though he could not disguise from himself the fact that his prospects were still desperate.

Julia had only just come, and had not even had time to take off her outer wraps, when the letter arrived, and was handed to Edith, who was with her in her room.

Edith tore the envelope eagerly open, letting the envelope fall to the ground as she read the letter, and thus Julia was enabled to see the handwriting of the address, and, judging from the flushings that pursued one another across the reader's face, she took in at a glance the real facts of the case, and was confirmed in her belief as to Edith's motives for the marriage.

Edith read and re-read the letter before looking up, but when she did catch a glimpse

of Julia's face—for she was half afraid to meet her eyes—there was a curious stolidity and want of expression about it, as its owner busied herself in unpacking her bags. Edith was puzzled at this, for look as she would she could not find in any corner or dimple a suspicion of the tantalising cynicism which she had prepared herself to meet. Julia maintained a steadfast silence, and went on with her occupation, until Edith could bear it no longer.

'Oh, Ju, dear,' she said, with the tears almost welling over in her eyes, 'don't be so hard on me. You know for whose sake it is that I am—earning the money!'

Julia's heart was softened.

'Yes, dear, I know,' she said, 'and you are making a great sacrifice for him; but how will he like it do you think?'

'He wouldn't like it at all, if he knew, but he won't know anything about it until it is all over and I am free again. I have written to ask him to promise never to ask about me, or to mention my name to anyone, and I am quite sure he will do anything I ask him to, and so he will not come to know until I tell him. He would be too noble to let me sacrifice myself for him if he knew, and after all it can't last very long, and I shall be free once more.'

Julia, seeing that it was too late to argue about it, and that it would be only making Edith unhappy to try to dissuade her, yet could not refrain from saying,—

'Yes, dear, your reasons are all very well, from your point of view, but I am very much

afraid that you will have a very miserable time of it during your married life. I am quite sure that Mr Ryves is a scoundrel, and although he really loves you now, his love will wear out in a very short time, and—'

But Edith interrupted her quite angrily.

'Julia,' she said, 'once for all I *will* not have you say a word against Mr Kasker-Ryves. It is treacherous enough in me towards him to marry him only to get his money, and I will not be so vile as to let anyone, even you, say a word against him in my presence.'

And Julia answered humbly,—

'You are quite right, dear.' Nevertheless she said to herself, 'I know there is something false about that man's smile, either his teeth or his heart, and after careful examination I am sure his teeth are real, therefore it must be—hum,' and she began to talk about events and happenings to mutual friends in London during the three months of her absence.

Edith had long since given up attempting to penetrate her friend's motives, and had indeed abandoned even surprise at her most unaccountable actions, nevertheless she could not rack her brains how she would guess why her friend should make up to old Mr Ryves in so open and barefaced a manner as she did thereafter. Mrs Ryland was terrified, and had almost made up her mind to expect that Julia would at the eleventh hour snatch the tempting morsel away from her daughter, as she had already snatched away the son, and Edith

was almost of the same opinion, but she gave Julia her due in not attributing to her mercenary motives. She rather thought that Julia wished to draw the old man away from her in order that she might not sacrifice herself on the altar of Mammon. Therefore she herself was so unusually gracious to her septuagenarian *fiancé* that, between her unwonted kindnesses and the equally unexpected advances of Julia, he began to imagine that within his handsome whitened sepulchre there must lurk an octuple essence of Narcissus' charms, and he smiled more and more, until Julia felt quite certain, from frequent opportunities of observation, that his teeth were not false, and that—hum. She observed it, and was troubled in her mind for the sake of poor Edith, who was to pine and mope for a time in the sole society of so unpromising a companion, therefore she redoubled her endeavours to please him; and Julia could be very charming if she liked, so that before he departed for the night he had given her a general invitation to visit them at his estate on Blackstone Edge, where they were to spend their perpetual honeymoon, which invitation Julia accepted, and intended to make the most of, for Edith's sake. Thus the last night of Edith's maidenhood went by, and those of the parties concerned who slept at all had dreams varying from mere unpleasantnesses of the tight boot order to blue and corpse-peopled nightmares.

On the morrow came the civil formalities,

uniting alpha to omega. Julia was never able to make up her mind, as an impartial spectator, whether the moral was pointed in a more ghastly manner by the ceremony as it took place in the registrar's office, with the snuffy, routine-worn registrar and the smoking chimney, the satisfaction of the bride's mother, the semi-reluctance of the father, the pale-faced, determined bride, with her forced smile and the tears pressing tumultuously against the barrier that withheld them, deep down in her brown eyes, whether it were more ghastly thus, in the fog of the January day, or whether the grim jocularly would have been enhanced by being tricked out with the 'pomp and circumstance of glorious' marriage, the slow moving grandeur of the marriage service, and the joyous peal of the wedding march. Fancy 'until death do them part' in such a case, or 'those whom God had joined together,' with an abyss of more than half a century between them. Would a skeleton look worse tricked out in cloth of gold or in a shroud of grey? The shroud certainly seems more appropriate. To look at the two parties most deeply interested we might well have hesitated to say which seemed nearer the grave—he or she.

For he was flushed and eager with the excitement and joy at heart, rendering him apparently twenty years younger and even more handsome than was his wont; but the bride was pallid, with yellow-green shadows under her eyes, and with the quivering brown lashes and brown eyebrows emphasising the pale-

ness of the face. But more frightful were the hectic spots over each cheek-bone, until there seemed no colour left save only white and golden-brown.

Considering that the marriage was voluntary on her part, a stranger might well have fancied that it was the bride who was lingering through the last stages of the surest of diseases, and that her groom might well live through a couple of decades. For a night passed without sleep, after many other such nights—passed in an agony of mind more excruciating than ever was agony caused by the Scotch thumbscrews of the *Merry Monarch*—nights of continual straining and tearing at the heart-strings, will have a frightful effect on the face of anyone, much less on a fair-complexioned maiden not fairly out of her teens.

Once only a great rush of blood to her head, as she signed her name, gave her for the moment intense pain, and a transient sense of swimming giddiness before the eyes ; but the blood sank down once more, and she grew calm and pale as erstwhile. Only a shudder shook her as her husband kissed her ; but that was but, as it were, the roughness at the river's bar, as the boat dashes out from the gliding calm into the turmoil of white waters beyond.





CHAPTER IV.

Despair was never yet so deep
In sinking as in seeming.

CLEMENT HOLLEBONE had lapsed into a hypochondriacal phase of his existence, which was somewhat contrary to his usual frame of mind. Having been left largely to himself, by his bent of disposition as well as by circumstances, he had become 'a dreamer among men,' apt to make mountains out of molehills, and, by natural sequence, springing in fancy over insurmountable obstacles. Thus he was as a rule easy-going, and contented with his lot in life, and in a quiet way, simply '*pour faire passer le temps*,' had accomplished an immense amount of work.

But the sudden change in his fortunes had an effect on him similar to that which a railway accident might have created, disturbing his entire equilibrium and spoiling his digestion; moreover, his psychological condition was by no means ameliorated by the proceedings in the Bankruptcy Court—not that there was anything discreditable or unpleasant in

the records of the firm, but a public examination is always a disconcerting experience to go through.

The impairing of his digestive organs caused blue vapours to arise therefrom, and roll around his brain, taking the form of projects and ideas, more or less tragic, but always determinative, comprising suicide, starvation, setting up as a travelling tinker, an usher in a school, or selling himself to Her Most Gracious Majesty, to be shot or die of cholera, at fifteen-pence a day—with deductions.

The most attractive of his various ideas was the one which prompted him to make away with himself. There is a sort of jingo glamour about suicide that captivates shallow thinkers or people that brood too much. It was, however, mainly indigestion with Hollebone.

He used to wonder if Edith would cry for him, or commit suicide over his grave—and so forth. From which you may imagine what progress the disease had made in him, besides which he was very much in love—oh, very.

The winding up of the firm's accounts took some little time, and, as you may remember, created no small excitement in the North of England, for it had been considered very safe indeed.

One morning on his arrival at the office, Hollebone found a letter awaiting him, from a Miss Joan Hallbyne, who announced that she was a maiden aunt of his on the maternal side, and that, having heard of his misfortunes, she would be very glad if he would come over and

pay her a short visit at her house near Blackstone Edge.

Hollebone, who from mere '*mauvaise honte*' had held aloof from any society whatever since the disaster, accepted the invitation with considerable pleasure, for he felt in want of a change. Of his aunt he knew but little, for her name had not been mentioned in his presence for many years—not that there had been any friction between his parents and her, but they had quietly gone each their own destined paths—and their paths had led them asunder.

His mind associated her with old-fashioned stiffness and with the pride of county family, with riches and with the courtly graces of the early decades of the century, he having been a very small child when he had seen her last.

Therefore he wrote to her, appointing a day when he would come over from Liverpool. It was already late in the afternoon of Candlemas Eve that he alighted at the station, with a seven-mile drive before him, across the grey Yorkshire land, with a cold, grey earth beneath and around, and a cold, grey snow-boding heaven above and around. At Candlemas the days should be drawing out a little, but that day everything was grey with the approach of evening, and the groom had lit the lamps of the carriage that Miss Hallbyne had sent for him; for the darkness was already upon them when they reached the Roman road that crosses Blackstone Edge, and the impression the drive left on him was that of a whirl of leafless pollard

trees, stretching their quivering branches up to heaven as though they deprecated the coldness of the snow-laden sky, for in effect the snow had begun to whirl down before they turned into the drive that led up to the house. In front of the door a carriage was standing already, awaiting somebody, and as Hollebone entered a lady muffled up to her eyes in furs brushed passed him in the hall and entered the carriage.

At the door of a room an old gentleman was standing, with his hat in his hand, taking leave, and evidently intending to follow the lady into the carriage. As Hollebone entered he said,—

‘Ha, Miss Hallbyne, here is your nephew. How do you do, Mr Hollebone?’ and he held out his hand cordially.

By a great effort of memory Clement remembered who his interlocutor was, and answering, ‘How do you do, Mr Ryves?’ he greeted his aunt.

Mr Kasker-Ryves cried suddenly,—

‘Edith, come here,’ but on looking round he saw she was already in the carriage. ‘Oh, well,’ he went on, smiling complacently, ‘I must tear myself away, Miss Hallbyne; my wife keeps such an uncommonly tight hand over me, and “needs must when the devil drives.” She won’t let me be out after dark. Good-day, Miss Hallbyne; good-day, Mr Hollebone,’ and he bowed himself out, looking the beau-ideal of a fine old English gentleman.

Miss Hallbyne closed the door, and made Hollebone take a seat.

‘Well, Nephew Clement,’ she said, regarding him closely, ‘and how are you? You have altered greatly since I saw you last? But that was twenty years ago, at least. Now, just sit down before the fire and have some hot tea. It will warm you after your cold drive, and you can go to your room afterwards, you know. You must excuse my not driving over to meet you, but I am getting a little old now, and it is fourteen miles to the station and back.’

But Hollebone said,—

‘Oh, Aunt Joan, how could you think of coming?’

Miss Hallbyne was busying herself with the tea, and Hollebone took a careful survey of her. She was small, and had a remarkable mass of dark brown hair, fitting tightly all over her head, and braided at the sides. It never occurred to Hollebone to doubt the genuineness of her hirsute appendages, but she was over threescore years and ten of age. Under this black mass her face was yellow, scored and wrinkled till it resembled a face over which a net had been stretched. Her eyes were black, deep, and very piercing, and her whole aspect had an air of intense malevolence, which her voice, querulous and harsh, enhanced. Nevertheless, in spite of this, she did not give at all the impression of malevolent feeling that her face and voice expressed, and on looking at her more closely one could tell that she had once been a

woman of wonderful beauty. She seemed, like the mummy at the Egyptian feasts, to remind one obtrusively of the fact that '*tempora mutantur*,' etc. Having finished her operations at the tea-table, she advanced towards him with a cup of tea.

'I don't know how you'll like the flavour of it,' she said; 'it's some Russian tea that Kate had sent her as something very special. I don't like it myself. I think it tastes like stewed oatmeal. However—'

She seated herself on the other side of the fireplace and looked for a moment at the fire.

'Shall we have in the lights?' she said suddenly. 'It gets dark so soon now-a-days that I really don't care to go out, and the weather is so bad. Kate has gone over the Edge, to Healy Hall, I think. She has a great friend there, and they hold Sewing Bees or something every week.'

Hollebone, not knowing who Kate might be, relapsed into silence, with a vague general remark of—

'Yes, that's very pleasant for her.'

Miss Hallbyne manifested no desire to break the silence, which seemed to Hollebone to grow decidedly oppressive, and he tried in vain to make himself appear 'at home' by drinking his tea in small sips, but when that was finished he felt entirely lost; and since his aunt seemed to be in a reverie he let himself lapse also, gazing into the depths of the fire.

'The last time I saw Cousin John—' said Miss Hallbyne suddenly.

Hollebone started, and returned from his mental travels.

‘I beg your pardon,’ he said.

‘The last time I saw Cousin John,’ his aunt repeated, ‘was in seventy—just twenty years ago. You were then, I think, about five, were you not?’

‘Exactly,’ answered Hollebone.

‘Cousin John died next year, I believe.’

‘May I ask who Cousin John is, aunt?’ said Hollebone desperately.

‘Why, your father, of course,’ she answered. ‘He and I were cousins, or at least our fathers would have it so. As you know, probably, the family is an old Dutch one, and descends from Holbein, the painter of Queen Elizabeth’s time, so it is said. Our common ancestor settled in Hull at about that time, as some sort of a merchant—a draper, I think. He had three sons, of whom the eldest went out to America, and was the first of the family of the present Holbeins there. The second son was an ancestor of yours, and founded your house in Liverpool in 1590, just three hundred years ago; and the youngest, after making a large fortune, bought this present house and property, and here I am. In some way or other your grandfather and my father became acquainted, and not only that but fast friends; and considering that we were collateral branches, we were used to call each other cousin, and your father married my sister. But now I want to know something about your affairs, Nephew Clement.’

He shook his head.

‘I am afraid I have very little to tell you that serves any purpose other than what you know. Cheetham has been trying hard to compound matters with the creditors, but they are a little touchy over that absconding business of the year before last; and as to that signing away my private fortune, it would have fallen in from the trustees in a year and a half, and the Court would have, quite probably, refused my discharge until after that, so that it makes very little difference in the long run.’

Miss Hallbyne nodded.

‘You may be right, Clement,’ she said, with perhaps a touch of pleasure in her voice; ‘anyhow, I was very glad you did it. For the name is an old name, and the house is an old house, and one would have felt sorry if it had been dishonoured while there was a penny left to pay. But I am very sorry for you. It must be a sad blow to lose your entire fortune. Are you very hard up just at present?’

Hollebone shook his head.

‘Oh, no, aunt,’ he said; ‘that is, I can manage to jog along somehow for the present. You see I’ve never been used to spend much money, anyhow. Certainly not a tenth of what I might have spent if I had wished. I’ve always gone in for study more than anything else, in a quiet way, and now it doesn’t pinch me very much, and I should not care at all if it were not for—’

He stopped, but his aunt understood him more or less, and forebore to press the point.

'You must draw on me if you are at all pressed,' she said. 'Would you like a cheque for three or four hundred now?'

Hollebone shook his head.

Oh, thank you, aunt,' he said, 'I have really no need for it just at present, and even then I have no claim on you at all.'

'You have saved the name, Clement,' she said. 'I would have done it myself if you had not, but it would have taken almost my last penny. However, that is neither here nor there. What I want to know is, what you are thinking of doing in the future? I suppose, with all your learning, you will be soon one of the first men in the country.'

Hollebone laughed somewhat bitterly.

'Oh, aunt,' he said, 'I wish it were so, but there is absolutely no opening for me anywhere that I can see. If it were not for the fact that I am an M.D. I might as well think of flying as making a living. However, I suppose I shall rub along somehow.'

His aunt, however, returned to the charge.

'Well,' she said, 'but you will have to buy a practice anyhow, and in that case I insist on your falling back on me for the money.'

Hollebone reflected a moment.

'Well, aunt,' he said, 'I might do that, and indeed I should be very glad to do so. I have lately been making inquiries about a practice, and I have heard of one at Dymchurch, on the Suffolk coast, which would suit me very well. It belongs to an old doctor, who is seeking a partner, and so far as I can

tell it would be the exact thing to suit me, with plenty of work to do and an old hand to look after me at first. For, to tell the truth, it is some years since I made my M.D., and it is just possible that I shall be a little strange at first.'

'Well, nephew,' Miss Hallbyne answered, 'you know best what will suit you, and you shall have any money you may want for the purpose. But now, I suppose, you would like to go upstairs to your room.'

Hollebone assented, and his aunt led him upstairs to a great oak-wainscoted room, in which the two candles and the fire served only to emphasise the darkness and vastness. His aunt pointed to a steaming kettle that stood on the fire.

'There is hot water,' she said, 'and if you want anything else you must just ring for it. Be careful how you lift the kettle.'

So saying she left him to his own devices and went downstairs. Hollebone, after having taken as general a survey of the room, and as minute an inspection of the pictures and the carving of the wainscoting and cupboards, as he could with the aid of his two candles, proceeded to perform the operations of the toilet usual on such occasions, ruminating the while over his aunt's conversation.

'I can't see why Aunt Joan should take such a particular trouble over the family name. I suppose it is because she has been living for so long in the atmosphere of county families,

and so forth. Anyhow, she seems to be a nice enough old body, taken all in all, and I suppose it must be a crotchet of hers. But even then my name is not the same as hers.'

Why do people occasionally stumble by accident, as it were, on a clue that would guide them to the centre of a labyrinth of motive and then pass it by without thinking it of any value? At anyrate Hollebone passed on in his train of thought, but Miss Hallbyne, in the drawing-room below, had drawn out from a long unopened drawer an old album, full of old silhouettes, but the one at which she remained looking was that of a young man of, it may be, twenty or more years of age, and which bore a striking resemblance to Hollebone.

No doubt, dear reader, you will turn up your critical nose, which has grown of late accustomed more to realism than sentimentalism in literature, at the thought of an old maid having need to dry her eyes at the reminiscences of the *temps jadis* which is over and fled half a century ago. But Miss Hallbyne had once been young, and once had been beautiful, and in recollections a day is the same as a thousand years, and 'a thousand years but as a span,' *pour ainsi dire*, and the sight of Hollebone had touched a hidden spring in a ghost closet that contained many and many a faded and dusty note of memory. For Miss Hallbyne had been the less beautiful of two beautiful sisters.

She had sunk into a brown study once more,

when the door opened and a girl entered briskly, jarring on all Miss Hallbyne's nerves.

'Well, Aunt Joan,' she said, with a cheerful laugh, 'and so he has come. Well, and what is he like?'

Miss Hallbyne pointed with her finger at the silhouette.

'That is he,' she said shortly.

The girl looked at it.

'Why, but that is fifty years old or so. It must be his father?' she said inquiringly.

Miss Hallbyne nodded her head.

'Yes, that is Cousin John,' she said. 'But you might take it for Clement just as well.'

The girl answered aloud,—

'Really? How nice!'

But to herself she said: 'H'm, I must be careful. To twist the adage a little, one might say, "The eyes in which the father hath found favour will find little but good in the son." I must really take care. I don't know that the best way would not be to make love to him right off. However, I must think about that a little first.' Aloud she added,—

'Well, aunt, I will just run upstairs and make myself presentable to my cousin.'

And Miss Hallbyne answered,—

'Yes, do, Kate.'

Left to herself once more, she said, 'How nice it would be if Clement would marry her!' and with a sigh she relapsed into her brown study, which reigned unbroken until dinner was announced.

At the sound of the gong Hollebone made

his appearance almost simultaneously with Kate, and she was introduced to him as his cousin from America.

‘Kate is not a Yankee, though,’ Miss Hallbyne added, more or less apologetically. ‘Her father was my half-brother, and some twenty years younger than I. He tried to found a business in New York, and failed rather badly. He died very shortly afterwards, leaving Kate an orphan, and since then she has lived with me, and is my right hand. Isn’t that it, Kate?’

Kate assented, with an inclination of her head. She was engaged in taking a minute survey of Hollebone’s points.

‘From what I can see of him, at so short a glance,’ she mused, as they passed from room to room, ‘I should say that that young man was in love with someone or other, and in all probability she threw him over when he was ruined. Now, it remains to be seen if I shall find it worth my while to cut that somebody out in his affections. If Aunt Joan takes it into her crotchety old head to leave her money to him it might pay me for the trouble, and if I were to marry him before her death she might will all her money to the two of us. Yes, that would not be a bad thing. I must think about it. In the meanwhile I must keep the conversation in a sort of general groove, until I make up my mind finally.’

Accordingly, when they were comfortably settled in the dining-room, she began,—

‘Ah, Cousin Clement, you must have had a

nasty cold journey here. It was coming on to snow quite fast when I came home.'

Clement answered,—

'Yes, it was just beginning to come down when I reached here. The weather seems to have set in regularly for snow.'

His cousin went on,—

'Oh, by-the-bye, aunt, I meant to tell you. Whiggitt shied as we passed the gates of Blackstone Hall. The Ryves' carriage lamps frightened him, I suppose; they were just turning into the drive. Our carriage went right into the ditch with two of its wheels, and one of the windows was broken—and Whistler says Whiggitt's got his sides a little cut.'

Miss Hallbyne looked up from her soup quite alarmed.

'But, my dear girl, I hope you are not hurt at all. It was very careless of Whistler.'

Kate laughed.

'Oh, indeed, aunt,' she said, 'it wasn't Whistler's fault. It was Whiggitt's if it was anyone's. As for me, I'm not hurt at all—not even shaken. Mr Ryves was very much alarmed, and insisted on sending me back in his carriage after it had set them down. One of our shafts was broken. So, you see, I came back in state in a carriage and pair, whereas I set out in a brougham.'

'Well, my dear,' her aunt answered, 'it was considerate of you to break the news to me so gently, and I sincerely hope you are not hurt. Had we not better send for Dr Long at once?'

But Kate answered,—

‘Oh, no, indeed, aunt; I am not a bit hurt. I haven’t even a bruise.’

‘How is Whistler, too?’ asked Miss Hallbyne. ‘I hope he is not injured at all.’

‘I just sent Jane down to ask how he was, and she said that he seemed all right, only very bad-tempered. You see, he had to leave the brougham and come home on the box of the Ryves’ carriage, and I suppose the other coachman crowed over his upset a little. The brougham and old Whiggitt had to remain at the Ryves.’

‘Well, well, my dear,’ Miss Hallbyne said, ‘we must be thankful it was no worse, that is all. The Ryves were here this afternoon.’

‘Yes, so they told me. I made the acquaintance of Mrs Kasker-Ryves. She seemed to me a little too quiet and pale to suit my taste.

‘Did *you* think so?’ Miss Hallbyne answered. ‘I don’t think she was very well this evening—I noticed she turned quite pale suddenly while we were talking. I happened to be just saying that you were coming down here, Nephew Clement, when I noticed her turn quite red and then pale. I suppose she must have been feeling unwell, because almost immediately afterwards she made her husband move by saying that it was coming on to snow, and that she could not allow him to be out late in such cold weather. You know Mr Kasker-Ryves, don’t you, Clement?’

And he answered,—

‘Oh, yes, I know him—that is, I have met

him once or twice. But I did not know he was married.'

'No. Isn't that strange. No one knew anything about it, and all of a sudden he appeared with a wife. Quite a young and lovely girl too. It seems they were married very quietly—almost secretly one might say—to avoid the strain consequent on a public marriage. She is the daughter of a small millowner in Manchester, and, so far as one can tell, it appears to have been quite a love match, and her parents ostensibly rather objected, but in spite of that she persisted. As a general rule I believe it is the daughter that objects to marrying an old man.'

'Not when the old man is a senile millionaire. What do you think, Cousin Clement?' Kate asked.

Hollebone smiled.

'Well, it does look rather fishy,' he assented. 'But I *have* heard of love matches of that sort, and I suppose it is not so unlikely in the case of such a very fine-looking and estimable a man as Mr Ryves, setting aside his ducats. At anyrate no one could object to him as not being an "*homme mur*."'

'You might even say he was over-ripe—a sleepy pear, in fact,' Kate answered.

'Oh, no, Kate, I don't think he is that at all,' Miss Hallbyne objected. 'I'm sure no one would think he was eighty. Why, he's quite as active as any young man. He rides and shoots and looks after his property, and

is a J.P. In fact he might well be forty years younger. I think it's quite wonderful.'

'Why, it's a new departure for you to stand up for him, Aunt Joan,' Kate answered. 'I remember when he bought Blackstone—twelve years ago—how you used to cry out that the whole country was falling into the hands of the shopkeepers.'

Aunt Joan smiled somewhat guiltily.

'Well, my dear,' she said, 'one must keep pace with the times, I suppose, and the tendency is nowadays to abolish social distinctions altogether. When duchesses take to dressmaking, and noble lords marry actresses—in my young days they didn't do it so often—I suppose simple county families must not be above associating with shopkeepers, or *even* Americans.'

'Exactly,' said Hollebone, and his aunt gave a little sigh.

'Yes,' she went on. 'I used to be a Whig in the old days, but now I am an out and out old-fashioned Tory. What with Reform Bills and Free Trade and Home Rule, and they even talk now of Disestablishment and abolition of the House of Peers, but that won't come about until I am dead and laid in my grave.'

'Why, then the Church and State will be safe for a long time yet,' said Hollebone cheerfully.

'I don't know about that,' Miss Hallbyne said. 'Another winter like this will finish me off,' and Kate murmured in her heart of hearts: 'God send it soon!'

But Hollebone answered,—

‘Nonsense, aunt, you will live to see the new century in.’

She answered wearily,—

‘God forbid. I have had enough of this one.’

‘Well,’ thought Kate to herself, ‘if I let her go on like this she will be getting into such a sentimental state of mind over the past love that I shall have a bad time of it in the future. It would be just like her to change her will right off to-night, without even troubling Cheetham to come over and do it for her, and I might fare badly in that case. I must change the course of conversation, and then take a little time to think.’ Accordingly she asked,—

‘Do you know what Mrs Ryves’s maiden name was, Cousin Clement? Aunt Joan and I have been debating about it, but we cannot agree, and no one seems to know it.’

Clement shook his head.

‘I’m sure I don’t know anything about her,’ he said. ‘I did not even know Mr Ryves was married.’

‘I am almost sure her name was Hisfield. I know it had something to do with “field,”’ Miss Hallbyne said.

‘It must have been Hisfield. There is a cotton firm of Hisfield, Hixen & Hutt. I think you said she was a millowner’s daughter,’ Clement answered, and his aunt said,—

‘Yes, that must be the name. I know it was something like that. Well now, my dears, I must say good-night, and leave you to the tender mercies of each other and the dessert. I daresay Kate will let you smoke a cigar

afterwards, and then you can get her to sing for you. I have to go to bed early on account of my health. By-the-bye, we breakfast at half after eight. I suppose, if I tell them to bring your water up at eight, it will leave you time. Good-night. God bless you both,' and she kissed her niece and left them to themselves, much to the delight of Kate. As to Hollebhone, he was quite unconcerned either way.

'The time must pass one way or another,' he said philosophically, 'and I may as well talk to this girl as to anyone else since I can't get at Edith.'

One is apt to forget one's pessimism to a large extent just after a good dinner. It is not until the dinner begins to have its effects on the liver some hours afterwards that the vapours rise up to the brain and cause impenetrable despondency and gloom to settle down over one's mental prospect, and so Hollebhone accepted his fate with as good grace as possible; and any other young man might have felt himself in remarkably happy circumstances to be thus *tête-à-tête* with a beautiful cousin, most anxious to charm and to appear charming—though certainly Hollebhone did not know that.

But he was very much in love with his beloved, and for the time, as indeed it had been for some two years, his love was his ruling passion, and he never committed the smallest action in his life without thinking whether it would have any effect on his relationship to Edith.

Therefore he passed a more or less pleasant evening in the society of his cousin. That young lady, with a view to adapting herself to his tastes, felt him carefully all over, and not being able to make very much out of the indications that she thus discovered, fell back on the infallible method of getting at the hearts of all young men, and of old ones too, for that matter (but more especially of such as have what one calls by courtesy, a talent for one thing or another), namely, pretending great ignorance of his particular *forte*, and wonder at the gigantic intellect enabling one to pursue that study.

Dinner had been finished, coffee had made its appearance and disappearance, Hollebone's cigar had let its last wreath of smoke float upwards to the dark oak ceiling of the dining-room, and he had done his best to persuade his cousin to join him in a cigarette—which she had smilingly refused—and they had adjourned to the drawing-room.

'Now you are going to sing me something,' Hollebone said, for to tell the truth, much to his discredit, he was beginning to get a little tired of her innocent conversation.

I say much to his discredit, because no young man of a well-regulated turn of mind should get tired in the course of a single evening of the conversation of a fair girl, whose face is, ostensibly, the index of her mind, and whose blue eyes are, or at least seem to be, the windows of her soul, more especially when he has already the advantage

of a cousinly standing, which is worth at least two months' start in an acquaintanceship.

'Now you are going to sing me something,' Hollebone said.

And she answered,—

'Oh, certainly—that is, if you don't ask it out of courtesy, because Aunt Joan suggested it—besides which, I haven't got much of a voice, and perhaps you don't care much about music.'

Hollebone gave a sort of internal groan.

'Oh, on the contrary, I am particularly fond of music, and as to your voice I'm sure it must be lovely, anyhow.'

Kate blushed with joy. She was a very good actress, and said,—

'Oh, come, Cousin Clement, how can you possibly know that?'

Clement smiled.

'Why,' he said, 'one generally judges of a person's singing voice by their talking voice. If they have a very melodious and sweet speaking voice one imagines that they sing equally well, don't you see?'

And Kate answered,—

'Ye—es,' with another blush, and then she went on. 'Well, since you *are* so pressing, and pay such nice compliments, cousin, I will sing you something, but you must accompany me.'

Hollebone said, 'Oh, blow it!' to himself, but aloud,—

'Oh, very well, if you don't mind a somewhat wooden touch.'

But Kate answered archly,—

‘Oh, I’m sure, cousin, your touch must be lovely, anyhow.’

‘I certainly don’t see how you can tell that,’ he replied.

‘Why,’ she answered, ‘one generally judges of a person’s playing touch by their shaking touch. If they have a very pleasant way of shaking hands one imagines that they will have an equally pleasant touch, don’t you see.’

Hollebone answered,—

‘Oh, c-come now, that’s rather far-fetched now,’ and his cousin retorted, with a light in her dark blue orbs, ‘Tit for tat, Cousin Clement.’

But Cousin Clement was instituting a mental comparison between his cousin and Edith, which was not altogether flattering to his cousin.

‘Bother the girl,’ he said to himself, referring to Kate, ‘what a nuisance she is. I wish she’d begin and squall—at anyrate then I should not need to bother myself with answering her nonsense, though I shall have to strum. Not that she is bad-looking by any means, but she ain’t a patch on Edith. You see, although they’re both fair, it’s a different kind of fairness. Little E.’s is quite transparent, like marble or alabaster, with just a faint tinge of colour—oh, and such a lovely mouth, that looks as if it were just always wanting to be kissed—whereas this’n’s got a regular peachy pink-and-white complexion, with the peach bloom and all, if it isn’t powder, and then her mouth is sort of puckered up under the lips, so that it looks as if she were always pouting; and then Edie’s

nose is quite straight down, not turned up at the end like this one's, and Edie's eyebrows are dark and beautifully shaped, not pale and invisible, and her lashes are dark too, and when they lie down on her cheeks they're just like a delicate fringe—and her face is a lovely oval, not round like Kate's here—and her hair isn't near so light as Kate's, not golden at all, but just dusky brown, with a tinge of gold in the shadows—and then her eyes, why, this girl's are cold and hard, steel-blue in fact, whilst Edie's—oh, how lovely they are!—light green-brown, so that one can look right down into the depths and see all her thoughts; and then to see the love come up in them, and to see her flush, and to think that she loves me! I tell you what it is, Chaucer knew what he was about when he wrote—

Youre two eyn will sle' me sodenly.

If she had eyes anything like Edith's—but that isn't possible.'

During the time it took him to think this rhapsody he was saying, 'Let's have a song, cousin.' But his cousin, who noticed the longing look which had come into his eyes *maugre lui* at the thought of his love, divined easily enough the reason for it, and recognised the fact that it would be necessary for her to make herself very agreeable indeed to counteract that influence.

Therefore she said to herself, 'H'm, he wants flattering a little;' but aloud,—

'Well, you shall have a song, only it's just

a little too soon after dinner, and we've got the whole evening before us. I'm afraid you'll find it awfully dull with no one but me to talk to.'

And Hollebhone answered,—

'Are you often "took sarcastic?"' but to himself, 'Oh, blank that girl and her gush!' and Kate went on,—

'I wonder how it is that anyone who is so great a scientist as yourself can possibly condescend to care for so trivial a thing as music.'

'Think I'm too stupid?' suggested Hollebhone lightly.

'Oh, no,' she answered, 'not *exactly* that, only music is so simple, and requires such little thought to make and understand, whereas chemistry is a serious and dignified study.'

'Think so?' said Hollebhone, who was beginning to get cantankerous.

'Why, yes,' she went on. 'Now all a composer of music has to do is to find out a tune on the piano, and then put some chords to it, and then have it played on a dozen fiddles and some trumpets and give it a name, opera or symphony or anything. Well, and then a painter merely takes a pencil and a piece of paper and draws away and rubs out until he gets something like something, and then he takes a brush and puts paint on, and that's practically all. And as for a poet, he just gets a story, and rhymes "dove" with "love" and "above," and then he's written a poem. But

a chemist is something really wonderful. He can take a piece of iron and find out its components and constituents in a minute, and knows how long it will take for a stone to fall from the top of a tower, and can understand all sorts of queer signs, like cels and crabs, that they call scruples and drachms, and that S_2O means sulphuric acid. But just fancy a stupid man of business, now, who sits all day long and writes down figures and adds them up again—and then a mere pianist or fiddler is even more stupid, he only has to look at notes and draw a bow across some squeaky strings.'

This was just a little too much for Hollebone, who, like every true lover, thought that his mistress's occupation must of itself be infinitely above his own because she engaged in it. He didn't mind Kate's strictures upon composers, painters, and poets, and rather liked her ignorance on the subject of iron as an element, because it made him feel very wise indeed, which was as a matter of fact exactly what she had meant that it should do; but when it came to her estimate of the genius that Edith needed he felt himself struck on a raw spot.

'My dear girl,' he said, 'if you will allow me a cousin's privilege of speaking a little didactically, I would say you are talking abject nonsense. The exact reverse of what you imagine is the true view of the case. Anyone, by serious application and hard work, can become a very decent chemist, but to compose, and more especially to play the

violin really well, needs a genius of the highest order, such as I can never hope to attain.'

Kate said very humbly,—

'Well, cousin, I suppose you are right, because you know all about it, and I know very little.'

But to herself she said, 'Good Lord, what a fool I was not to remember that his beloved might perhaps play the fiddle. I do nothing but put my foot in it this evening.'

But Hollebone was beginning to repent his rudeness at seeing her humbleness of demeanour, and he said,—

'Well, Kate, let's have a song now, if you've had rest enough after dinner.'

And she answered,—

'Oh, yes. Have you got any matches? You might just light the candles at the piano.'

He did so.

'What would you like?' she asked.

And he answered,—

'Oh, just anything you please.'

'Let's have something old-fashioned to begin with,' she said, and produced '*Batti, Batti*,' singing it indifferent badly, as amateurs *will* sing Mozart. Hollebone at the end paid her the most brilliant compliments on her voice, and begged for something more, whereupon she accordingly essayed one of those terrible ballads of a sentimental order, all about people wandering over hills in all sorts of 'weathāh,' accompanied by a fiddle or a dog, and set to a peculiarly diabolical waltz tune that goes on jingling through one's head for hours after

the song has ceased sounding through the air. Now it happened that, by some strange coincidence, Hollebone's beloved, whom he, rightly or wrongly, thought to be possessed of the most wonderfully sweet voice that ever thrilled out into space, when she was more than usually inclined to torment her unfortunate lover, was in the habit of insisting on singing this identical song, until he, who swore by nothing but the Music of the Future, was fain to stop the proceeding coercively.

Therefore when his fair cousin commenced this effusion his flesh began to creep, and, what with her singing and the badness of the song, he suffered frightfully. Nevertheless in spite of that he struggled gamely through to the end, but all the same his cousin noticed his agony, and when she had finished, said,—

'You don't like that, do you, cousin?' and Hollebone replied,—

'Why, I think I prefer *even* the "Message" or Haydn's "Dream."'

Kate smiled.

'Well, it wasn't my fault that I gave it you. You *wouldn't* say what sort you wanted. That is one of a stock of such songs that I keep for my aunt's lady friends. You prefer the advanced German school, I suppose.'

And so she sang, more or less badly, one or two more songs, but through the song of the Loreley, and through the 'Alphorn sounding towards Strasburg,' through Schumann, through List, Schubert, Franz, in spite of all

times and measures, that terrible waltz tune whirred through his head, and even afterwards when he was in bed trying vainly to sleep the continual 1, 2, 3-4, 5, 6 kept driving his thoughts irresistibly to Edith, causing a great loneliness to press like a heavy weight on his heart.

And all the while his poor beloved was lying awake, trying in vain to stifle even one little thought of him—for she held it would be sinful—just one little thought, deep down in her heart. But she struggled and battled manfully and prayed for the dawn.

It was very dreadful to her to have been under the same roof with, and even to have touched her unconscious beloved for a second, as she had that day, and yet to know that between them a gulf was fixed as impassable as that which separates the Earth from Heaven. And the grey morn crept in and saw her struggling and battling and praying against her desire.





CHAPTER V.

Like a fine old English gentleman.



MR KASKER-RYVES was a man universally esteemed in his part of the country. Of all who came in contact with him there was no one, not even the most spiteful, that had a word to say against him, such were the sterling good qualities of the man. The vicar of the parish, who had, it must be confessed, been reading one of Cardinal Newman's sermons, was heard to remark that Mr Kasker-Ryves possessed all the good qualities attributed to St Paul, and the Wesleyan minister fully endorsed the opinion of his brother of the Established Church. The recipients of his charity never had any complaints to make of either stinginess or ostentation. They said he gave for the mere pleasure of giving, as a truly charitable man should do.

The county families of the vicinity, who had at first resented the intrusion of a shop-keeper into their very midst, became by degrees converted to a different view, from familiarity, for one reason, and because, they

said, of his real worth and polished manners, but perhaps more than all because young Kasker-Ryves when he had left college had been in the habit of bringing down the scions of the most noble houses in the land—dukes, marquises, belted earls, and occasionally, with awe be it spoken, a prince of the Blood Royal, to shoot over the Blackstone moors.

The very poachers, whom it was part of Mr Ryves's duty as a member of the Great Unpaid to sentence to terms of durance vile, always said that he did it in such a gentlemanly manner that it was more a pleasure than otherwise to be sentenced by him, and even his servants pronounced him perfect in every respect. Therefore it stands to reason that he must be very perfect indeed if his servants said so.

He was, in fact, Sir Roger de Coverley, without any of the worthy baronet's want of knowledge of the world—a fine old English gentleman, without the repulsive bluntness that must at times render that character unbearable in spite of his preternatural goodness of heart.

This was Mr Kasker-Ryves—who that knew him could forbear to love him?

He bore his seventy odd years as though they had been forty, was a very decent shot even at that, and rode like a major-general on parade, although it must be said that he had of late given up hunting as too fatiguing.

The morning ensuing on the events recorded in our last chapter found him already

round on horseback, in spite of the snow that lay thick on the ground, to ask how Miss Kate felt after the last night's accident to the carriage. Miss Kate's rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes testified to the fact that her health was in no wise impaired by the accident, and Mr Ryves was truly delighted to see it.

He also deprecated the misfortune that had caused him to be the reason of Miss Hallbyne's brougham upsetting, and hoped Miss Hallbyne would avail herself of his brougham until hers could be repaired.

Miss Hallbyne thanked him cordially for the offer, but said she would have no use for the brougham in any case, as she had the close carriage and dog-cart to fall back upon, besides which she would not be going out at all while the weather lasted so bad. Mr Ryves then turned to Hollebone, and begged him to come and have a few shots at the hares, which were very plentiful just then near a copse on the borders where the Blackstone and Hallbyne estates adjoined each other. Hollebone said that he would be delighted, provided his aunt would dispense with his company until lunch time. Miss Hallbyne consented readily enough. Mr Ryves thereupon rode off home to get rid of his horse, and to procure a gun and a couple of beaters.

At Miss Hallbyne's suggestion Kate put on her things and guided Hollebone down to the house of the head-keeper, which lay a

short distance from the Hall, almost hidden in the trees of a young copse, and very beautiful Kate looked, as even Hollebhone must needs acknowledge. Her face was flushed with the cold and the exercise, and daintily her feet ran in and out her petticoats as she picked her way, tiptoed, where the snow lay lightest along the road, whilst with the one hand she held her dress gathered, and in the other a basket. For Kate was a bearer of good cheer to the needy among her aunt's tenants, and a very bright and cheerful messenger of good tidings too. And all the while she was debating in her mind whether it would be better to slip and fall altogether, so that he must help her up, and they could laugh merrily over the mishap, or merely to slip and stumble against him as he walked. Finally she decided on the latter course, and when she had decided, how daintily she fell against him, not heavily and clumsily, but just a little slip sideways, and an appealing little touch on his arm as she saved herself.

'Oh, I beg your pardon,' she said, in the loveliest rosy confusion, 'but the road is so slippery.'

And he answered,—

'Oh, don't mention it. Won't you take my arm?' which was what she had meant he should do.

She accepted his proffered support with a smile.

'Now if you fall we shall both go over

she said laughingly, and she leant on his arm with a good deal of her light weight.

She knew very well what an intoxicating sense of intimacy the pressure of an arm will give a young man, and how exhilarating is a brisk new-year morning with snow just whirling lightly down and the ground covered with a pure white mantle, and she knew very well how beautiful her face must look in the brilliant light that the snow threw on it, and how fair it must stand out against the great black hat she had purposely put on. What young man could resist the impulse of that moment and fall over head and ears hopelessly in love with the beautiful face that was smiling so enticingly near his own? And yet Kate recognised the tormenting certainty that, spite of it all, Hollebone was by no means falling in love, nor was there the slightest inflexion in his voice to point to the existence in him of such a state of mind, and disgusted with her failure, she was delighted when the keeper they were in search of came round the corner, with his gun under his arm, and his rosy cheeked son sauntering along munching an apple contentedly and whistling in an undertone.

The keeper was a shrewd-looking, brown-bearded, weather-worn man, with 'North country' printed everywhere on his face. There was a curious twinkle in his eyes, which accorded, perhaps, ill with the serious cast of the lower part of his face. A kindly smile lit up his face as he caught sight of Kate,—

'Ah, good marnin', miss,' he said, as he touched his hat.

And she answered,—

'Good morning, Ben,' she said. 'This is my cousin, Mr Hollebone.'

And the keeper said,—

'Good marnin', sir.'

'We were just coming to borrow a gun of you,' Kate said. 'My cousin wants to shoot with Mr Ryves before lunch, and the guns up at the Hall want seeing to a little before they'll be fit to use. You'll have to come up for them.'

The keeper looked delighted.

'Run, lad,' he said to his son, 'run awhoam as fast as thi legs can carry the' and fetch th' new goon an' some cartridges. Yo' known the number. Awe reckon yo'll be goin' to shut deawn by the coppice, sir? An' Mr Ryves'll be bringin' his own beaters? Are yo' beawn any furrer wi' Miss Kate to'rds the village, sir?'

But Kate, who had by this time left his arm, refused his company steadfastly, saying that he must not keep Mr Ryves waiting on any account, and she turned her back resolutely on him and walked towards the village. The keeper thereupon turned towards Hollebone.

'Well, sir,' he said, 'awe reckon since yo've got yo'r leggin's on yo'll not be mindin' a tramp through the snow wheer it lays a little deep across the hollow. It'll save us a goodish bit o' t' road, and awe'd like wi' your permis-

sion to cross t' spinney at t' hind end. Awe tho't awe heerd shuttin' last neet down that away, but it were such a frightful night wi' t' snaw an' all, and it didn't seem beawn to tak' oop at all, an' so, as awe didn't feel sure for certain, awe didn't think it worth mi while.'

They turned into the snow, and for a time the keeper was silent, until Hollebhone happened by chance to ask him what sort of a landlord Mr Ryves was, and the man's face lit up with an expression of honest pleasure, as North country faces will do when they speak of a man they like out and out, and he burst into a panegyric of Mr Ryves that showed that Mr Ryves was enshrined in his heart at least.

'Th' Squire is as good a lonlord an' as kind a mon as you'll find in a week's journey. We say that, what wi' your aunt and Mr Kasker-Ryves, the poor in the village live a great deal better than we 'at addle our own livin's. Miss Kate and Mr Ryves's house-keeper are for ever in the village wi' soups an' jellies an' suchlike mak' o' works. Now, Squire Bampton's very different. He's a regular skinflint, and squeezes for his rents, an' never lets tuppence out of his pocket when a penny'd do; and Lord Tatton is as bad, though they say that's along of his lordship's bein' very hard up, and then his lordship don't live here but up in London somewhere, and his overseer squeezes like Owd Harry. Not but what the young lord is a nice outspoken young felly, and they say he's goin' to

marry a furriner—'Merican, I think, with plenty of money, so some o' that may come into the estate. Here we are, sir, and here's the Squire.' They had just turned the edge of the copse. 'And there's his lordship too—they've got a brace already.'

Mr Kasker - Ryves nodded cheerfully to them as they came up.

'Here you are,' he said. 'Let me introduce Lord Tatton.'

Lord Tatton looked at him, and held out his hand with a smile of recognition.

'How do, Holly, old boy?' he said cheerfully.

Hollebone shook his hand, but it was plain to see that he did not recognise his interlocutor.

'Glad to make your acquaintance,' he said. His lordship looked surprised.

'Come, this is too doosid cool of you, 'siderin' how mashed you used to be on my sister. How de do, Stinkey? P'r'aps you'll remember me now? How much for sulphuretted hydrogen?'

A light burst on Hollebone, and a smile rippled his face.

'Why, it's you, Bobby,' he said. 'Blowed if I knew you, what with the handle to your name *and* your moustache.'

'Flattering to me, ain't it, Mr Ryves, considerin' he and me was at school together. Shared studies at Rugby, an' all that sort of thing, doncher know?'

At that moment a hare ran out of the thicket, and as no one was ready for it except

Mr Ryves, that veteran took it beautifully, though to be sure it was an easy shot, and the little creature rolled head over heels, with a piteous squeal, and lay kicking, sending the powdery snow flying in spraylike showers.

‘Run and kill the little beggar,’ he said calmly to the keeper, and then, turning to the other two, ‘Well, young men,’ he said, ‘I don’t think much of your sportsmanship—neither of you ready.’

‘Well, I’ve only just come up, and—’

But at that moment a burst of assorted game came out from the underwood, and all six of their barrels told, for the shots were easy and close.

‘Good business,’ said his lordship. ‘Wish it wasn’t so jolly cold, though—sorter freezes a feller through, ’specially as I’m supposed to be recruiting from typhoid, doncher know?’

‘Poor fellow,’ said Hollebone sympathetically, ‘you look like it,’ and indeed his lordship looked remarkably ruddily healthy.

‘Tell you what it is, Squire, your young friend—that’s what he called you, Holly—your young friend wants sitting upon; he ain’t sympathetic enough with interesting invalids.’

‘Talking about invalids,’ Mr Ryves said, ‘I’m sorry I can’t ask you both over to lunch, but my wife is far from well. In fact I almost think I will go back and see how she is. I called at the doctor’s myself this morning, and left word for him to come on and see her, but he hadn’t been when I came down here. You must excuse me, but don’t let me interrupt

your shooting. If you give the game to my keeper, he will send it up to the Castle and the Manor.'

'Hope it's nothing serious with Mrs Ryves,' said his lordship, and Mr Ryves answered,—

'Oh, no; I think she took a cold driving home last night. A touch of the influenza maybe,' and he walked off homewards, looking as he went across the snow every inch a grand gentleman of the old school.

'Tell you what it is, Stinkey,' said his lordship, 'I vote we chuck it up too and go home. P'r'aps your aunt'll give me a drink. Anyhow, I'll go round your way on the chance of it. Got any coin for the beaters? I haven't got a sou in my pocket.'

Hollebone having arranged that matter to the satisfaction of all concerned, the two young men walked away and began to reminisce.

'Well, old boy,' the lord began, when they were out of the hearing, 'and how has the world been usin' you?'

Hollebone replied that he had managed to rub along somehow, and asked for information about his noble companion's career.

'Oh, I,' said that noble peer, 'I've been sowing my wild oats ever since the old Earl my uncle died. I've been going the pace regularly. Played the very doose with my money. The dad gives me a pretty liberal allowance. I don't mind telling you he ain't any too flush himself, and so the year before last I had a regular smash up with my duns, well on towards six figures, and the dad said

he wouldn't give me another monkey. If I wanted to live I should have to stop in his house, and give in my accounts weekly—pretty stiff on me, wasn't it? However, I was pretty sick of my life, and so I tried to reform, and as the dad and my mother were going to yacht it round the world, and the other fellows chaffed me rather about my reforming, I thought I'd go with 'em. You see the governor wanted to save a little, and so he let the house in Grosvenor Square, and stuck a regular deuce of a bailiff at Tatton here, and then we went. 'Twasn't half so dull as you might have thought—really, now, I ain't joking—an' we saw all sorts of queer things—mummies and pyramids, and cannibals and monks and monkeys, and all the things one sees when one goes round the world. You haven't been? Ought to go, 'tain't half so bad, really. Well, I went overland across America, and the dad and the mater went round. They took up the Earl and Countess of Stene—your flame, you know. I never could get on with Trix, nor Stene neither for that matter, and so I left at San Francisco and went overland to New York, and on the cars, that's what they call the trains, you know, over there, an' it takes a whole week to get across. Well, on the cars there was an old bloke and his daughter, who'd been doin' the world too, and was also going right through, an' so I thought it wouldn't be a bad thing to have a flirtation,' specially as she was a regular stunner, and so I made myself agreeable to the old bloke, but blow me if I

didn't fall slap in love with the girl. I didn't know I had a heart before—but somehow there was somethin' about that girl that quite took my breath away, and so— But the funny part of it was, tho' p'r'aps you won't believe me, she had read a lot of books, and knew about poetry and painting and suchlike things that one usually thinks are snobbish; and, really it's gospel truth, what with one thing and another, when she talked about that sort of thing I really felt such a fool not to know anything about it that I, joking aside, read some poetry on the sly, by a feller called Rossetti. Ever hear of him? No, really? Have you read some of him? Well, and the funny part of it was that some of it seemed to sort of fit me the way I felt to a T. And there was one poem about the Blessed Damozel. Know that, too? Well, it goes—

The Blessed Damozel leaned out from the gold-
barred gates of Heaven,
She had three lilies in her hand, and the stars in
her hair were seven,
And her eyes—

Well I don't know how it goes on, but I know it seemed to me he must be talking of Muriel, and somehow I felt awf'ly bad about her—awf'ly—though she was a Yank. 'Pon my word I really fell in love with her, though you won't believe it. I didn't know, and I shouldn't have cared if I had known, that her father was the richest man in the States—almost. His name is Gubb.

Really I didn't do it for the 'oof, I swear it, and so, one day I went down on my knees to her and told her, and she said she'd have me—but I felt so bad about it that I told her I'd been rather a rough lot during five years or so, and she said that if I really loved her, and all that sort of thing y'know, she didn't care what I'd done so long as it wasn't downright damned, and I ain't been that altogether—and so the long and short of it was I wrote to the pater about it, and he said he didn't mind. To tell the truth, he was only too glad I should bring a little cash into the family, and we've got blood enough to do for half a hundred Yanks even, and so we were engaged. I was almost afraid it wasn't me but the title Muriel cared for. But one night, Ryves, this fellow's son—he's a damned beast—yes, I can't help it, though Muriel made me promise not—he is a *damned* beast—well, he and Tupence, and the Duke, they're all in the same boat, it happened that they were all in New York together on some devilry, and they heard what was on the cards, and so they came and made me—yes, they *made* me—I was sorter ashamed to refuse—come and make a night of it like old times, and the beasts they made me squiffey—regularly squiffey, although I took precious little on purpose; but they doctored everything I took, and put gin in my whisky instead of water, and then they took me and laid me on her doorstep, an' I lay there all through the night, 'cos the bobby who found me knew I was too drunk to walk and

he was too lazy to send for an ambulance. Well, in the morning, what with the drink and the fear that Muriel would chuck me over, I was in a high fever, and I simply was a candidate for Bedlam for three weeks, an' through it all Muriel nursed me like an angel—and made herself ill over it, too. An' then they sent me off to England, and Muriel is to follow in three weeks' time, and in a month we're to be married. Meanwhile I've come down here just to keep out of harm's way, 'cos I can't trust myself. And now you know all about it, old boy, and I've made a virtuous resolve. I don't know how it'll please you. I'm going to hang on to you for three weeks, and go only where you go, 'cos I know you were always a steady-goin' fellow, and you'll keep me in the right groove. Somehow or other I can't keep in it myself.'

Hollebone smiled.

'I'm afraid you won't have much of a time with me,' he said. 'Hadn't you better hang on to old Mr Kasker-Ryves. He'd keep you straighter than ever I should, and he's a jolly old fellow from all accounts, and you'd find me rather dull company.'

His lordship shook his head.

'I have been trying him for a week,' he said, 'but he's so wrapped up in his wife that it's rather dull hearing him rave about nothing but her. Otherwise he's a good old fellow enough, and he gets on well with anyone. T'other day he had a poacher brought before him, and instead of stickin' the man in quod

he gave him a lecture on the cruelty of wiring hares instead of shooting them, and then told him he might go, and he was to ask the steward to give him work on Blackstone if he found any difficulty in getting it. Brent, that's our bailiff, told me he's reclaimed quite a lot of blackguards that way, and made them decent members of society. Jolly old boy, too, don't preach at all, and knows a lot of good stories that he can tell even before his wife. I know I've written some of 'em down so that I can tell 'em to Muriel, 'cos although tellin' stories is awful bad form, somehow Muriel seems to like it—an' I don't know any stories that one can tell a girl, doncher know?—but I told her one, you know, about the Texas Ranger an' Hell an' the sulphur, an' she laffed—she did, 'pon my word. Yes, old Ryves is a good old boy, even though he is rather a bore when he gets on the subject of his wife—but, then, fellers are rather that way, ain't they? I mean when they're really in love. But I tell you what it is, his son—the young 'un they call him, an' he looks it, but he's over forty if he's a day—he's a regular out an' out blackguard, even though I ain't been particularly squeamish. He really is. I'd no more let him speak to Muriel, or to any decent girl, than I'd— I'd knock his head off first. He used to be in the reg. when I was there, before I got my title y'know and had to move when the dad cut off the supplies; but that feller, he was such a blackguard out an' out that the boys cut him, and you know

fellers in a regiment ain't—well, any too starched that away. Funny that such a good father should have such a frightful son. I say, old boy, you won't give me away, will you?'

'As how?' asked Hollebone.

'I mean what I told you about Muriel. Somehow it sorter slipped out natural like to you, 'cos we were always so much together at school, an' I almost felt like old times. Tell you what it is, old boy, when you get in love, I mean like I am, you feel bad all over. I know, when I thought she was going to chuck me after all, it wasn't a pain in the mind so much, but I felt as if someone had stuck a fish-hook in my throat and was pulling it. An' now, even though I've only been away from her three weeks, I feel sore all over. You don't know what it is to be in love—I mean real, not as the fellers are about a gal.'

Hollebone groaned in his spirit.

'I know all about it,' he said wearily.

'No, do you, honour bright? Look here now, you tell me all about it. You let me run on and pump me dry and never tell me a word.'

'Well, I really haven't got anything to tell you,' said Hollebone. 'I just heard her play at a concert she gave, and somehow or other I regularly "flopped." That was the long and short of it.'

'Well, but what sort of concert was it—charity, or a drawing-room thing of the mamma?' asked his lordship.

‘Why, neither; just a concert she gave—a professional.’

‘Oh, come, Holly, that’s too good,’ said his lordship ruefully. ‘Do you really mean to say you’re going to marry a music-hall singer or a bally-gal, you who were always so flush of tin? Not but what I’ve known people of that sort who kept quite straight, too,’ he added apologetically, seeing that his friend’s face was clouded over.

‘Look here,’ said Hollebone, disengaging himself from his friend’s arm, at which that youth looked the picture of ingenuous surprise. ‘Look here, your lordship, I don’t know whether you are speaking like this to be purposely insulting to me, but by Heaven’—Hollebone was working himself into a frightful temper—‘by Heaven, if you do not this instant apologise for what you have said I will knock you down—upon my word and honour as an Englishman. Edith is a lady whom you are not fit to speak to. What do you mean by it? Do you think you can dare to speak to me like this because I am ruined, bankrupt, dishonoured, anything you like?’

His lordship answered, quite clearly and frankly,—

‘Now, look here, Clem, don’t be a fool. I didn’t mean to insult you, or the lady either. I give you my word, by all that’s sacred. I didn’t, and I don’t even know now what I have said to annoy you so awfully, really.’

Clement was hardly to be appeased so soon. He immediately launched out into a vein of

very flimsy sarcasm at his lordship's expense, which his lordship took very humbly, for to tell the truth he, although like us all at heart very selfish, yet was trying to mend his ways, and even open out his views against the narrowness of his ignorance, rather than prejudice, under the light that had streamed into him from the West. Of course, too, Clement should have made allowances for the young lord's bringing up, and not have let out at him in his fine vein of sarcasm—of which, to do him justice, he repented immediately afterward—besides which the poor fellow had been having a bad time of it for the last three months, and having someone at last on whom he could vent his wrath, and whose feelings he felt confident he could hurt, he did it to the very best of his ability, and then leaned his back moodily against the gate that led into the highroad, at which they had by this time arrived, staring into the snow, awaiting his lordship's reply, which ran thus:—

'My dear fellow, 'pon my word I think you're right, and that people that go in for art and po'try and music, and that sort of thing, are really better than fellows like us, that is, like me I mean, who do nothing but loaf. I never looked at it that way before y'know, and it comes rather strange, and it just fits in with what Muriel says too, and so I suppose it *must* be right. I say you don't think that if I had a music-master, an' swatted awfully hard for three weeks, I should learn to play the music for her songs when she sings?'

An unwilling smile flickered over the face of Hollebone.

'No, I don't think you could, your lordship,' he said.

'How long would it take me, do you think?' (anxiously). 'I would like to give Muriel a surprise.'

Hollebone was thawing rapidly.

'It's just possible,' he said gravely, 'that if you practised very hard indeed in two years' time you might be able to make a very bad accompanist, but you'd have to go at it very hard indeed.'

His lordship's face fell dismally.

'You ain't jokin'?' he asked. 'It looks so jolly easy. All these things do. It always seemed as if it'd be the easiest thing in the world to play the piano or make some po'try. I *did* try to make some once, but I got stuck first line. I couldn't find a word to rhyme with Muriel except Escurial—that's the place in Spain where they've got a lot of nigger writings — Moors, they call 'em — not the Scotch sort—but, then, Muriel and Escurial wouldn't fit together, 'cos if I said

I first met Muriel
In the Escurial

it wouldn't be true, 'cos I met her in San Francisco.'

Hollebone could stand it no longer, and laughed outright

'Things are not what they seem, doncher know?' he said cheerfully; 'people who go in

for art want plenty of brains, not like you and me, if you'll excuse my rudeness.'

For a moment his lordship looked straight at his friend, with a world of meditation in his eyes. They were still standing at the gate, and the snow lay more thickly piled where they were, for the wind had blown it into a drift.

'Tell you what it is, Holly, me boy,' said he suddenly, 'I don't know what you feel like, but my feet are gettin' doosid cold. If you don't mind, I'll just walk on while you're leaning against that gate, 'cos, jokin' apart, I really am rather shaky after the fever I had in New York.'

Hollebone stood up straight, with a start.

'I beg your pardon,' he said, 'I was thinking.'

'Were you now?' said his lordship; 'and what were you thinking of?'

'I was thinking of her,' said Hollebone.

'Really now,' his friend replied. 'And what was her name? You know you ain't half confidential enough after all I've told you.'

'Well, it's Edith Ryland,' said Hollebone.

'Eh?' said his lordship, feeling quite scared. '*What's* the name?'

'Edith Ryland. Why, do you know her?' asked Hollebone.

'Not exactly—that is, I met her once at a hop. Rather like one of Rossetti's pictures, only she don't wear her hair long, and it isn't red. That's the style, ain't it?'

Hollebone nodded.

‘You’ve about struck it,’ he said simply, not being given to rhapsodising out loud.

‘Good Lord!’ said his lordship to himself. ‘Now I can understand why Mrs Ryves looks so pale and is taken ill suddenly. Tell you what it is, this bloke’ll be committin’ suicide if I don’t look after him. I know I would if that were to happen to me. Poor gal, they must have sold her at home to that old beast, though he ain’t a beast neither. I s’pose it ain’t his fault. Holly don’t seem to know anything about it neither. I’m awf’ly sorry for him—awf’ly. He is a good feller, though perhaps he’s rather stiff. He said something about being ruined too. Wonder what he meant? I s’pose it’ll come out sooner or later, but I really must look after him and see he don’t find out about her being married. Old Ryves might die even before he did if I’m careful, though the girl looks rather as if she’d go off the hooks before him, poor old boy. It’s rather hard lines for him too, ’cos he seems awfully fond of her. I know I should feel awful bad if I thought Muriel loved some other feller and only married me for the title. I know what I’ll do,’ and he said aloud,—

‘I say, Holly, what engagements have you got for the next three weeks?’

Hollebone answered,—

‘Well, I’m going down to Dymchurch the day after to-morrow, just to see someone. I shall probably come back the same day, and then it just depends how long I shall be free.’

‘Well, look here, old boy,’ said his lordship, ‘I’m going to hang on to you just as long as you’re here, whether you like it or not. Otherwise I don’t know what might happen to me. Young Ryves might come down and make me go to the devil again.’

Hollebone smiled.

‘I’m sure I’ve no objection to it,’ he said. ‘Only I don’t know what my aunt will say to your continually dragging me away, to say nothing of the fact that I’m awfully in the dumps just now, and you’ll find me very dull.’

‘What’s gone wrong with your works?’ asked his lordship artfully. ‘Won’t the girl have you?’

‘No, it isn’t that,’ Hollebone replied; ‘but the matter is simply that I’m ruined, absolutely cleaned out. Haven’t got a penny in this world that I can call my own. Well, of course, I don’t mind that’—his lordship groaned—‘but Edith’s parents won’t let her marry me, doncher see? and of course as she’s still a minor she can’t do it, and so I’ve got to wait a couple of years, and even then I don’t see how I can manage it. In the meanwhile I’ve promised not to see her or speak about her until then, and so you must keep it dark y’know. So you can just guess how I feel, because I’m fifty times more in love than you are, and I haven’t seen her for nearly four months.’

His lordship said,—

‘Poor beggar, I pity you,’ and he meant it. ‘But what are you going to do to get a living?’

I s'pose you can't become a rook if you want to marry and settle down?'

Hollebone smiled.

'I don't know whether you really want to insult me particularly,' he said. 'No, I'm not going to become a rook. I'm just going to become an ordinary country doctor. Pleasant prospect, ain't it?'

His lordship, however, said,—

'Well, I don't know. If you love your girl as much as I love Muriel, you'd be content to go about the world with a barrel-organ if only you could go with her. I say, old boy, are you very hard up? I can lend you three or four hundred if you like. They might last you a month y'know, and I'm rather flush just at present.'

But Hollebone refused the offer.

'I s'pose,' his lordship went on, 'you've come down to cultivate your aunt here. She's got plenty of 'oof—half a milion at least, I should say, counting the estate—and I s'pose you want some sort of a pickin' out of it. I tell you what it is, your aunt's a doosid good old lady—she is, 'pon my word. When she heard I was down here all alone she gave me a sort of general permission to make the Hall my home if I found the Castle too dull for me. I haven't done it as yet, 'cos I'm rather afraid of your aunt, to tell the truth, but I'm goin' to drop in with you to-day. Tell you what it is, your cousin (I s'pose she is your cousin) is an awf'ly pretty girl. I wonder you don't fall in love with her, then you'd get the money between you for sure.'

Hollebone smiled.

'There are two objections, I think, to that plan. In the first place, I don't want Kate, and in the second Kate don't want me, and besides—'

'How do, my lord?' a voice came from behind them, and the identical Miss Kate was standing there smiling and holding out her hand to the young lord.

'How do, Miss Kate?' said that nobleman, nowise abashed. 'I was just telling your cousin that I'm coming up to the Hall to take pot-luck, since your aunt has been kind enough to give me a sort of general invitation, doncher know?'

Kate smiled.

'I dessay you'll get plenty to eat if Cousin Clement has always such a small appetite as he had last night. I think he must be in love, my lord.'

'Think so?' Hollebone answered calmly.

'Yes, I think so. Oh, by-the-bye, I met Dr Long in the village, and he said he had just been to see Mrs Ryves, and that she seemed to be suffering from influenza and nervous prostration.'

'Queer thing that for such a young girl to suffer from,' said Hollebone cynically.

'Yes, isn't it?' Kate replied. 'It doesn't look like a love match, does it—anyhow, at least on the bride's part, though everyone says that Mr Kasker-Ryves is most devoted. He is such a good man; but money will buy anything—except love.'

'Oh, come,' said his lordship more earnestly than was his wont, 'what's the use of pulling a poor girl's character to pieces—she hasn't done anyone any harm? Why should you do it, you know?'

'Hello, Bobby,' said Hollebone jocularly, 'what's the matter with you? I never knew you stand up for anyone before. It's lucky Mr Ryves is not of a jealous disposition or we might find you one morning stuck through the weasand. It's just as plain as a pikestaff that the girl has either been forced into marrying him, or else she's done it simply for the money—probably six of one and half-a-dozen of the other—and all the while she's in love with some young fool, and now she's beginning to find it rather dull, or the old boy doesn't hop the twig as fast as she'd like. That's about the sum total of the matter.'

'Them's my sentiments,' said Kate, casting a laughing glance towards Hollebone, and all the while he was thinking, 'What a mean wretch he is to kick a poor girl when she's down like that. Now, I like the lord much better for standing up for her, even though it *does* look a little fishy, after he's been hanging about there all last week.'

But his lordship was saying gravely,—

'I don't think *anyone* who knew Mr Kasker-Ryves could wish him dead.'

And in that all three concurred, for to know Mr Kasker-Ryves was to love him.

But the three went into the house, and were received with effusion by Miss Hallbyne.

During the lunch Lord Tatton was unusually silent and thoughtful, but Kate and Hollebhone kept up a lively flow of conversation.

The poor little girl was beginning to hate her cousin with remarkable intensity, for she had realised but too well that, try as she might, it was useless; he seemed determined not to care for her, and her heart was beginning to ache at her non-success, and when a heart begins to ache in two days, what will it do in a fortnight? One must needs feel sorry for her, even though it was her own fault, but she wept very bitterly the night before he went away, and treated him very, very coldly when he said good-bye. And, of course, the moral is, that it's just as well to find out whether one's own heart is quite proof against everything before entering into schemes of a perilous kind.

Lord Tatton laughed outright when the Ryves' annual tenants' ball had to be put off on account of Mrs Kasker-Ryves illness.

'Hollebone seems to be doosid fond of making girls ill, but I wonder how he'll feel himself, poor fellow, when he finds out. I'm awf'ly sorry for him—awf'ly. And I'm sorry for the girl too; she must be wretched.'

In the whole country-side he was the only one who had a good word for poor Edith, and, indeed, what could they find to say good about it? If one makes mistakes, even though when very young, they must be paid for with tears and lamentations.

But everyone pitied poor Mr Kasker-Ryves.



CHAPTER VI.

Despair is Hope just dropped asleep
For better chance of dreaming.—*Blackmore.*



VERILY the ways of Providence are inscrutable,' or at least that was the opinion of Lord Tatton on the morning that he drove with Hollebhone to the station. Needless to say, his lordship did not express himself in those exact words, because I doubt whether his vocabulary contained so abstruse a word as 'inscrutable,' but he meant to think it, express it how he would.

For here had Hollebhone been for three whole weeks, within sound of cockcrow from the house of his beloved, nay, had even lunched within her walls, in a country-side where she and her husband formed the staple topic of gossip after the inevitable meteorological remarks—he had spoken of her a hundred times, and yet despite it all he was blissfully ignorant of the real facts of the case.

The time of his sojourn at Blackstone Edge had passed over, and he felt that his life of idleness was for ever over, and gone irrevocably, and through his veins ran the joy of vigour

and strength of labour, and his being tingled at the thought that each hour that he passed in toil would bring him nearer to Edith, and that it would be by his own merits that he would have gained her, and not through the toiling and moiling of his or her forefathers. Thus it cast almost a damp on his enthusiasm when Cheetham, the lawyer, for whom his aunt had sent (*Poor Kate*), and who was, moreover, his own legal adviser, informed him, with a twinkle in his grey eyes, that the creditors of Hollebone, Clarkson & Co. seemed more amenable to conciliation, inasmuch as through his, Mr Cheetham's, unremitting efforts several claims for insurance had been disallowed in actions at law, and that he, for his part, saw now additional reasons against the step which Hollebone insisted on taking, although he, for his part, deprecated it most strongly. And Aunt Joan joined her entreaties to Mr Cheetham's after that gentleman had taken his departure. She had from the first been averse to his leaving her at all, and would gladly have had him live at the Hall with her until she died.

'Where was the good,' she said, 'of a young man who, in any case'—she took care to emphasise this phrase—'would be worth between five and six thousand a year in a comparatively short time, where was the good of his burying himself in a country village when he might easily snap up a wife with an income of nearly the same amount, and settle down and live happily for the rest of his life?'

And Aunt Joan, with her simple acuteness, noticed that Hollebone blushed, and she was mightily pleased thereat. But, to tell the truth, Lord Tatton had made that very suggestion to him the same morning, and it may be that one reason that Hollebone was so anxious to get away from the Hall was that, to his horror and alarm, he had found on reflection and inward self-communing that he was not as entirely indifferent to his beautiful cousin as was compatible with his love for Edith, and like his friend Lord Tatton he decided to flee the temptation ingloriously. He began now to understand why it was that his cousin always flushed when he spoke to her, and why at other times she was so silent and her fair face so overcast. If that was what had come about in three weeks, what would happen in three months? In fact Hollebone began to get quite conceited, nevertheless he thought it better not to brave the danger.

Therefore poor Miss Hallbyne, in whom, as in the English race, sentimentalism lurks predominant, subcutaneous—for our subtlety and schism is but skin deep, protest how we will—Miss Hallbyne must perforce forego the company of Clement, who from very strength of old associations had grown to be almost the apple of her eye. And I have little doubt that the poor old lady, stiff and starched as she was, cried a little the night before he departed, for the sight of him had caused the return to her mind of an old, sweet sorrow, and she had grown old and feeble, and her

frame was ill able to stand even the shadow, falling thus after long years, of a passion that had once moved her in her most occult being.

But despite the advice of the lawyer, the evident grief of his aunt, the ill-concealed love of his cousin, and the saturnine hints of the peer, Hollebhone stood firm in his resolve, and his friend determined to see him through with it, or as he said, he wanted to keep straight for just two days more, 'cos then Muriel would be in London and he would be all right.

Therefore, in the early grey of the morning, they drove off from the Hall, over the snow-covered country into the cloud-veiled future. But though the morning had been white-grey from its earliness when they had set out, when they reached the end of their rail journey, and yet they had eight miles to go, it was already sunset, rose-grey in the west, and eastwards yellow-grey, with moonrise through the mist, and the greynesses met in a circle round the horizon, but overhead the sky-blue darkened from the earth towards the peak of heaven, and above the mist the stars showed pale, the large ones each with a ring or halo around it, and the small ones glinting but seldom as they caught the eye. Around, the earth was white with its mantle of snow, save where the wind had blown away the covering from the hedges, leaving black gaps therein, or where the white of the roadway was soiled with slight traffic of carts and men.

Blythborough is a town whose prosperity has long since gone to the grave, and '*Ichabod*'

been written all over it. Nothing remains to bear witness to its former greatness but a great grey gaunt church and the ruins of an old monastery, that throw up great shafts of solid masonry to heaven. There is, too, an old, old inn, with a great oak ceiling to one of its rooms, and an old, old oak staircase, which seem to cry with every creak, 'Yes, yes, say what you will. We can dream of beauties long in the grave, and of the old time, long before yours, when England was merry England.'

To this inn it was that Hollebone and his friend proceeded in the vain hope of finding a conveyance on to Dymchurch. Mine host refused, and very reasonably too, to saddle his ox or his ass or anything that was his.

'Eight mile to Dymchurch, and eight mile back, and the horse can only go at a walking pace for fear of falling. That means five hours, and in this bitter cold never a man can do it, let alone a horse; and there'll be a frost this night such as never was in England before. If you want to get there you'll have to walk it. You can leave your luggage here, and I will send it on by the carrier in the morning for you. Not that I should advise you to try the walk. It won't be very dark to-night, but you might quite easily lose the road, for in places there are no hedgerows, and the snow lies thick.'

But nothing would suit them both but that they must set forth on the walk, snow or no snow, cold or no cold, and so, having re-

freshed and paid, they travelled on at a good stride, significant of steadfastness of purpose. The earth hugged itself under its covering, and trees took strange forms in the misty middle distance—nor was there man, beast, nor bird abroad to testify that aught would ever come to life again, and in truth there was little to tell that anything had ever lived save the forms of dead songbirds that here and there lined the hedges. Then must the traveller on the road, perforce, adopt a swift pace from very strength of the cold, neither heed in his haste the slippery places of the road, but passing, with whatsoever luck God vouchsafe him, over all alike; and bad it is for him if he be not warmly clad from tip of toe to end of nose. Neither cares he much to converse with his fellow, lest in turning his head to one side he uncover an ear that now is sheltered warmly by the collar of his coat, but he keeps his face as steadfastly fixed whitherward he goes, and gets in anticipation what joy he can from the warm fireside that awaits him at his journey's end.

'I say, Holly, old boy,' said his lordship suddenly, 'did you ever read anything by Daudet the Frenchman, doncher know?'

'Why, yes, I've read the immortal Tartarin's adventures,' Holiebone replied.

'No, I don't mean those,' said his lordship; 'they're funny. As a general rule one's apt to read French novels when one wants something a little fishy, or at least I used to, you know. I don't do it since—since I knew her.'

But, you know, lately I've been tryin' to read some books, and so I went to a feller who I knew knew all about 'em and asked him to lend me some 'at it'd do a chap good to read, and among 'em was one by Daudet. *Lettres de mon Moulin*, I think he called 'em, and in 'em was a short story that this landscape here, with the snow and stars, reminded me of, 'cos it's like a picture of the birth of Christ. It was about a couple of Provençal recruits who were dying in a hospital on Christmas day, somewhere in the north of France, in the time of the war, you know, and one of 'em sings a song, a carol, or something that ends up—

Bergers,
Prenez vos congés,

and then he dies—but it's so lovely you've no idea. I read it to Muriel, and she cried outright over it, she did, and it almost made *me* feel bad. It was just the look of the snow and those hills behind us made me think it was like Christmas time, an' so the thing came into my mind, you see.'

'Funny,' said Hollebone reflectively, 'but those same bells made me think of New Year, although we're nearly into February now. Edith used to sing something about bells ringing out to the sky. Tennyson I think it was.

Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring out the false, ring in the true,

and it goes on about, "Ring out the something lust for gold." And it always seemed so

funny that she should sing about "lust for gold," or about falseness either, for that matter, because she never cared a bit about money.'

'Poor fellow,' said his lordship to himself, 'how he *would* squirm if he knew the truth; but I don't see how he's to find out about it until poor old Ryves dies, and then it'll be all right again. Holly never seems to think about anything or anyone else but that girl.'

As a matter of fact, he never did see anything—a house, a sparrow, a toothbrush, or what you will—without its in some way bringing to his mind the form of his beloved; and round his heart there lay an aching pain and a sense of great void throughout his being, of longing unfulfilled and solitariness.

And so in due time they reached the scene of his future labours; and he secured at once the goodwill of his partner from the fact that he was the cause of a real live lord's sleeping under his roof, that peer being my Lord Tatton, whom Dr Hammond would by no means suffer to depart to an hotel, because one does not enjoy the privilege of having an earl's son under one's roof every day—at least so thought Dr Hammond.

A most ordinary little grey man was this Dr Hammond, with ordinary little crotchets about the discipline of his children and his liver, for he had served with his regiment in India, and had done good service among the wounded in a hill expedition, in which he had himself been struck down by cholera, and he had been forced to invalid himself, with a

small pension, in the late summer of his life, having saved just enough to buy a practice, which by careful nursing he had contrived to render very valuable. And then, being nearly half a century old, he had taken to himself a wife, who had died, leaving him with three young children. Therefore he had found it necessary, in order to be able to spare the time for the children's education, to advertise for a partner, who was to have the reversion of the practice at his death.

This was the life-history of Hollebone's partner, and quiet as it was the advent of a real lord into the bosom of his family caused a great flutter therein.

Mary Ann was ordered to wash the children and put on their best things at once, and they made their appearance looking, painfully neat and clean, a short time later.

The doctor had just finished a disquisition on tiger shooting, and the scion of the house, who might have been rising eight, thought fit to inform his lordship with perfect confidence that, 'If I saw a tiger I wouldn't be a bit afraid.'

'Wouldn't you now?' asked his lordship interestedly.

'Oh, Bobby,' said his sister, 'you runned away from a little dog yesterday what wasn't no bigger van my foot.'

'Well, but ve dog wanted to baite me, an' a tiger wouldn't baite.'

Dr Hammond, whose sudden cholera had effectually choked him until this moment, now broke this interesting conversation.

‘Gandon!’ he said sharply, imitating the voice wherewith a captain of horse shouts at his troop, ‘if you speak another word this evening without being spoken to, you go to bed, and you too, Maud.’

The time appointed for the children’s departure, as a rule, was eight of the clock, but not one of them for many weeks’ time ever reached that hour of the day without being sent to bed for some misdemeanour or other—in fact, the only days they did reach it were when the doctor either dined out or happened not to be able to get back from his afternoon round in time for dinner. Master Gandon held his peace, therefore, and for a time he employed a blissful immunity from paternal reproof, or if the reproofs existed they only had their being in fulminating scowls and black glances, and he and his sister cut their potatoes with knives, bit their bread, and even drank with their mouths full, shielded from castigation by the presence of the lord at the dinner-table. Now it happened that at the end of a long disquisition from Dr Hammond, going to prove that the liver was at the bottom of every human disease and evil, and that, from a careful analysis of the *Newgate Calendar* and ‘history of all the malcontents that ever were hung,’ he had come to the conclusion that never a crime had been, but that the temper of the criminal-committent had been soured by the badness of his liver. This disquisition being at an end, it happened that *Es flog ein Engel durch das*

Zimmer, that is to say, a silence fell on the room. And since that silence was oppressive to Lord Tatton he made haste to end it by saying to Gandon, out of kindness of heart and sheer geniality towards children,—

‘Well, old boy, and what were you thinking of?’ for Master Gandon had been eyeing him and reflectively analysing him from out his blue eyes.

‘I was finking,’ he remarked slowly, ‘vat your nails haven’t got black sands under vem like Mary Ann’s.’

His lordship collapsed dismally, for the remark seemed to be intended disparagingly, and Mary Ann disappeared suddenly from the room. But Dr Hammond, fiercely, and with more emphasis than the remark seemed to need, said,—

‘Gandon, go and see if the parlour window is shut.’

And Gandon also disappeared, to reappear also no more that evening. Such are the wiles of parents. Moreover, Maud, having made a great discovery, was unable, in spite of her utmost endeavour, to refrain from imparting it to her father’s noble guest, much to his suffused confusion.

‘Oh,’ she said, with her mouth and eyes wide open, ‘oh, you’ve got pomade on your hair, and pa says, “Ve putting of grease on ve hair is a d—d un-san-i-tary practice.”’

‘Maud,’ said her father, his eyes rolling most frightfully to see, ‘go and ask the cook what that smell of burning is.’

Nevertheless, no smell of burning was perceptible, but neither was Maud thereafter.

All things must come to an end, as Dr Hammond reluctantly confessed, even conversing with a lord, and doubly so when that lord is tired and sleepy and would take it kindly if they would but let him go to rest. But nothing would suit the doctor but that they must sit and smoke before the fire whilst he discoursed to them of love and matrimony, saying, 'Wait till ye come to sixty year,' and they looked the one at the other, and were loth to disturb with contention the peace of the fireside and the repose after snowy travel. Therefore were they content to pity the old man's foolish contempt for love, and hold their peace, looking at the fire and taking mighty comfort at thought of the cold without and the warmth within their own hearts and the hearts of their beloved, and the faces of their beloved rose before them in the wreaths of the smoke from their pipes as it writhed upwards.

But at last, after the fashion of those commonplace and querulous old men, who must give to others the benefit of their experiences and thoughts, Dr Hammond, having run himself out, was fain to let them go to their rooms above. Here the air struck cold on entry, despite the fires which burned bravely, with crackling of red embers, yet were they glad without more ado to doff their clothes in cold and shivering haste, thrusting themselves between the sheets, yet shuddering at the con-

tact, and praying that the bed might soon be warm, till from his fatigue of walking, and with little thought of future hidden woes and cares, each one fell, without more waiting, into deep and dreamless sleep, and the moonlight, slowly moving, threw strange shadows on the floor, through the diamond-shaped casements—tangled shadows intermingled like the nets that Fate had woven for their loves and them.

In the morning they woke, marvelling at the lightness of the rooms, which the snow lit up from the ground below, and at the strength of the cold, which had frozen the water in their jugs, and on descent to the breakfast-room they found the children already at their places, and their bibs, each with a suitable proverb, tucked under their rosy chins; and each of the little girls descended from her place and held up her face inviting kisses, and Hollebone noticed that the elder of the two had eyes like Edith's, and perhaps for that reason he kissed her twice on her chubby cheek and felt happy thereat; but his lordship's feelings were by no means the same—for one reason, he did not observe any resemblance between Muriel's eyes and any of the three pairs that he knew were scrutinising him with all the uncompromising criticism of childhood. However, Dr Hammond descended before they had time to fulminate any crushing observations on his lordship's ways and manners.

Dr Hammond's respect for the title had by

no means diminished by force of being slept over, and he gave himself unheard-of pains to further the convenience of his guest.

‘If your lordship is determined to leave to-day there is a convenient train at about two forty-five from Blythborough which will land you in London at about seven.’

‘That will suit me very well,’ said his lordship.

‘If so I can take Mr Hollebone round and introduce him to my patients that live near here, so as to be home in time for an early dinner, and then I can make my rounds over towards Blythborough in the afternoon, and drive your lordship there in time to catch the train, that is if you don’t mind an open dog-cart. It will be cold, but better than walking anyhow, and you won’t be able to get anything in the village here to-day. The weather is far too bad.’

‘I shall be delighted,’ said his guest, ‘if it will not be disturbing you at all.’

‘Oh, on the contrary,’ said the doctor, rubbing his hands. ‘Ah! here is the breakfast.’

And they were glad to sit down to the table and eat heartily of the homely fare the doctor had provided, for the coldness of the morning air, felt already in their bedrooms, had given them a feeling as of great void within, which hot coffee, with golden eggs and crisped fizzing bacon collops, white bread, pale butter, hard though it were from the cold overnight, would go well towards counteracting, and it was with a feeling of thankful repletion

that they rose at last, with great hopes for pleasure in the coming day.

For Hollebone the future was still all *couleur de rose*. The briskness of the breeze and the feeling on the air of the closeness of the sea, together with the excitement of rapid movement, cheered him as he drove through the snowclad country. The sun hung over the sea, showing through the frost-mist like a yellow gold coin, neither was it hurtful for the eyes to gaze upon. To be sure he was well received by all the people to whom his partner introduced him, for was it not well known that the new doctor had failed for goodness knows how many million, and that he was the nephew of a rich old Yorkshire lady, who might well leave him as many more, and that he had travelled down to Dymchurch accompanied by a real lord, some said a duke. All this and much more was already known about Hollebone, and insured him an excellent reception from everyone. And so after Lord Tatton had gone, and while a week was passing away, Hollebone had his hands very full of work, and very popular he was at that, for his patients found his manner pleasing and ingratiating, and the other doctors of the neighbourhood ground their teeth as they saw their patients desert them, and advertised each for a partner. And the very weight of the work was pleasing to him, for it was mighty consoling to feel at the end of a day's heavy work, when he could sit with his slippers on and warm himself, glancing

ever and anon for comfort in his loneliness at little Maud's eyes, that he was twenty-four hours nearer to Edith, and in the cosiness his melancholy felt itself incongruous and fled, leaving place in his mind for warmer hopes and dreams. And in truth the children, with their quaint ways of viewing things and little complaints of woe, when their father was not by to awe them, were to him the cause of much pleasure, and he would put himself to some trouble to improvise games with them or tell them tales, which he found no easy task, for their ignorance of things which to him were most simple made him be at much pains to explain incomprehensibilities to them and to adapt his tellings to their minds, so that a great bond was growing up between them.

But the time of the thaw being come, ushered in with a great fall of rain, first honeycombed the surface of the snow, and thereafter caused great running together of waters in the hollows, and showed the imperfections of the land, which before had gleamed pure and white, but which now lay black and sodden, open to the view when the fog veiled it not, and the roads grew heavy with mire, fat and unctuous, bespattering the legs and belly of a horse even up to the saddlebow. Moreover, the air was moist and thickly cloying, trying to both soul and body.

Then it was that the work began to increase for Hollebhone, even when the change in the weather rendered it the heavier to perform,

for in the early year, after the passing of the great frosts, the country there around is at its worst for health, being damp and low lying by the sea, which is indeed only withheld by dykes in places, and in those times ague and rheums are rife owing to the moisture. Now it may have been the prevalence of dampness in the air or the thickness of the fog which, keeping a man's eyes from seeing the things that are around him, must needs turn his thoughts on the things that are within him. Be that as it may, a feeling of desolation and utter hopelessness came upon him as he rode that day—a feeling that, try as he would, he could never win his beloved, and even of mistrust in her love for him, a thing that had never come into his mind before. But that day everything seemed to point to despair. His patients themselves, from the very strength of the bad weather, had either fared worse or those that were recovering recovered not so fast as they should. Thus it came to pass that he rode down the hill that leads from Southwold, for thus far he had penetrated along by the sea to the river where the ferry crosses, with a raft on chains for cattle. Arrived at the ferry, he stood and shouted to the men on the other side to come over and take him across. Either they did not hear him or else they would not heed him, preferring the snugness of the ingle nook to the damp yellow without, and Hollebhone, in black fury at their neglect, and not relishing a ride of ten miles extra round by Blythborough,

where the nearest bridge is, rode his horse at the river. The unwilling animal held its nose down and sniffed reluctantly at the swirling water, looking at it fearfully with its large eyes, after the manner of horses; but Hollebhone urging it more, it swerved and started back suddenly, until he, losing his temper at the delay, forced it willy-nilly—for his hand was heavy and his spurs long when he was of that mind—into the stream, until the unwilling animal bounded at it madly, not feeling the way carefully with its fore feet as a horse should do. Nevertheless, the river being neither deep nor at the time wide, for luckily the tide was running up, not down, with the swelling of the snows, the crossing was not difficult, for there were perhaps not more than four yards where the horse was altogether off his feet and the flood gurgled over the holsters. Yet it was with a feeling of disagreeable wetness in his lower limbs that he reached the other side, and in his heat of temper, reckless of consequences, put his horse at the top of its speed. The poor animal held out very well for the first four or it may be five miles, but within forty yards of the fifth mile-post its pace became more laboured, and within the quarter mile it had come to a dead halt, with its legs stretched far asunder and its breath coming hot and fast straight down from its nostrils earthwards, and Hollebhone recognised the unpleasant necessity of walking, either on his own legs or by means of the horse's, the remaining four miles, for the quad-

ruped could not, spur as he would, adopt a faster pace than a broken trot. Therefore he dismounted with much groaning, as a tired man will do, and holding the reins behind him, he tramped dismally forward through the fog and greasy mire, and once being down, he knew from the dire experience of dismounting that he would never have the courage to mount again, such was the stiffness of the joints that the wet had already caused to manifest itself. At last, after much cursing of his unlucky fate, he reached home, and giving the horse up to the stableman, to use that functionary's expressive diction, 'He swore at me so dreffle 'at it quite beat Dr Hammond holler, and he's a good 'un at it too.'

In the hall Gandon met him.

'Pa's gone over to Lady Ridley's,' he said, 'an' here's a letter for you, an' vere's a lady and gentleman waiting for you in ve 'sulting-room. Vey've been here ever since ve dinner-taïme, 'cos you're so late—and vey aren't patients, an' vey want to see you.'

Hollebone swore more veiled curses under his breath, in reverence for childhood.

'Who are they, old boy?' he asked.

'I don't know—an' vey don't know each ovah,' he answered.

Hollebone objurgated once more in secret.

'Wonder who the blank they are, and what the infernal regions they want with me?' But aloud, 'Oh, well, Gandy, just tell Mary Ann to take me some hot water up to my room. I must change my things before I

go in and see these people. I'm just soaked through.'

'Yes, an' yoah nose is all over mud,' said that veracious youth.

'All right; now just go and get my water, there's a good boy. I'll go up to my room and get myself a little more presentable,' and he proceeded upstairs, Gandon trotting obediently off to the kitchen after the water, which after a while reached its due destination.

Hollebone was much exercised in his mind, during his toilet, to imagine who his visitors could possibly be, but rack his brains how he would, he could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion, and he dismissed the subject from his mind for the moment. Before leaving his room he opened his window for a moment, and was surprised to see that the sun was glinting waterly and brightly for a moment through a rift in the fog, and the sea was dimpled merrily with sunbeams. But, even as he looked, the mist came driving thick round the corner of the house and veiled everything from view. He shut the window angrily again and went downstairs to the ordeal, before which, however, he took a stiff glass of brandy and water, for the poor fellow had been fasting since the early morning, and it might be now half-past three, and he went into the consulting-room with fresh courage instilled into him.

Mr Cheetham he had been prepared to find—he had indeed been almost expecting him for several days—but Miss Tubbs was certainly

the person farthest away from his thoughts. Nevertheless there they sat both over the fire, talking commonplaces about things in general.

Hollebone looked anxiously at Julia's face, hoping to find some index to her thoughts, but on it there was a placid, stolid smile meaning nothing.

'How de do, Mr Hollebone?' she said. 'Just happened to be in Southwold, and so I trotted over to see you y'know. Awf'ly bad weather, isn't it? I believe this gentleman has some important matters to interview you about, and so I'd better retire into myself for a time.'

Mr Cheetham, brought thus into prominence, held out his hand.

'How d'you do?' he said, his eyes twinkling more than usually. 'Will you allow me to congratulate you? I came over from Liverpool especially to see you about it—and I must catch the five-ten to be back to-night. So, if this young lady will excuse me, I would be very glad if you can let me have a short time,' and he intimated quite plainly that he would like to have a little private conversation; but Hollebone answered,—

'If it is merely business matters you have to speak about, you may certainly say it in the presence of this lady—allow me to introduce you. Miss Tubbs, an—an old friend of the family. She knows about as much as I do about my affairs.'

Mr Cheetham bowed drily, and his eyes twinkled more than ever. He interpreted

Hollebone's blushes to his own satisfaction, but nevertheless he had misunderstood.

'Very well, Mr Hollebone,' he said, clearing his throat. 'Things have been looking, at last, even brighter than before, from various small successes in the courts other than those of which I spoke, and your creditors have at last—I say "at last," for the delay, in spite of my utmost endeavour, has been unreasonable—your creditors, that is to say the larger ones, for the poorer ones have insisted, from sheer necessity though not from ill-will, on being paid off at once. The larger firms have accepted a composition of seven-and-sixpence in the pound, they themselves having constituted themselves the mortgagees of your private fortune, which is equivalent to somewhat over half your liabilities. This advantageous composition is, to a certain extent, due to commiseration for the unprecedented runs of ill-luck which led up to your disaster. Of course the oldness of the firm, and the regret that one would naturally feel at its disappearance after three centuries, had also something to do with it. However, to pass over the motives and get to figures, I have the exact calculations here. But, roughly speaking, the capital of the firm itself, after everything has been paid off, is somewhat larger than it was before, but you will have entirely lost your private fortune. This will make a difference of some eight thousand a year to you, which is not to be sneezed at, leaving you little over

seven, under the present partnership articles, supposing that the firm pays ten per cent., or two per cent. less than it used to. Mr Clarkson receives four thousand a year, and the remaining ten go to pay the interest on the mortgage—two hundred thousand pounds at five per cent. These twenty-one thousand pounds represent the interest on the firm's capital of two hundred and ten thousand pounds. Thus you will see that, considering the former economy with which you lived, you can leave this ridiculous place and return once more to civilisation—even marry and settle down. However, it seems to me I shall have to be going or I shall miss my train. Of course you accept the conditions?’

And Hollebone answered overjoyed,—

‘Of course I do. But, good God! Miss Tubbs, are you ill?’ for Miss Tubbs's face had assumed a waxy colour and consistency very unlike her usual complexion.

She answered, with a forced laugh,—

‘Ill! No, of course not. Why?’ and the colour rushed to her cheeks.

‘You were as pale as a ghost a minute ago.’

‘Was I? It must have been the surprise that this gentleman's information gave me.’

‘If you will excuse me,’ said Mr Chectham, dreading lest a love scene were about to take place under his very nose, ‘Mr Hollebone, I am in a great hurry to catch my train. Would you mind running your eye over this contract, and signing it if you agree? It con-

tains exactly in detail what I have already told you in rough. The others have all signed it, Mr Clarkson included.'

Hollebone did attempt to read it, and having in his hurry made out about one-half of its sense, which seemed to be pretty much what Mr Cheetham had said, signed it in due course, in the place above Clarkson's signature, as senior partner. Mr Cheetham rolled up his papers, leaving a copy of the accounts for Hollebone, and saying,—

'Good-bye; must catch train at all hazards. It's the last to-night. Sorry can't enter into details little more, but it's all right. S'pose we shall be seeing you over at the cinder heap shortly? Good-bye. Good afternoon, miss,' and bowing to Miss Tubbs, he disappeared into the fog without, for kind old man as he was he thought himself a little *de trop*, besides which he did hate love scenes, even when they were confined to veiled glances. They always made him feel embarrassed.

As Hollebone returned from the hall door Gandon appeared, coming down the stairs, and Hollebone said to him casually, as he passed again into the room,—

'Well, Gandy, I'm going to leave you. My ship has come home, old boy.'

Gandon by way of reply set up an inarticulate howl, to escape which Hollebone entered the room and shut the door.

Julia was sitting looking at the fire, and when he re-entered she turned to him and said, holding out her hand,—

'I suppose I may congratulate you on your good fortune?' and she accompanied the words with a smile that made Hollebone feel sure she *must* be ill in spite of her protests.

However, his mind was otherwise occupied at that moment, and he said,—

'Yes, isn't it awfully good luck? Not that I haven't been expecting it though, but still that don't make it any the worse. But, I say, have you got any message for me from Edie? And how is she, and where is she?'—Julia was glad he did not give her time to answer—'I tell you what it is, I'll leave this hole at once, and go and marry her right off. Her father said I could if I got five thousand a year, and I've got seven. When do you go back? We might go together, 'cos of course you'll be bridesmaid. But what on earth is the matter with you? Is it anything wrong with Edie? Good God! is she dead?'

And Julia, giving up any attempt at breaking the news, said simply,—

'Heaven help you, she is married,' and burst into tears.

It is not in the English nature to express its passions with dignity, though in individuals the power varies. Perhaps it is that in foreign nations their emotions are more superficial, and therefore show themselves with greater hability, and seem more fit. Be that as it may, an Englishman in high tragedy, or even in the heat of joy, seems out of place and angular, and Hollebone, under the sudden shock, could do nothing better than rave and

swear—blaspheming, abusing everything and everybody, animate and inanimate. The epithets which he applied to Edith were so shameful that even Julia, from the depths of her pity for him, must needs defend her with more warm feeling than she had thought possible.

‘It is you that should take the shame to yourself,’ she said hotly, unreasonably, unreasoning, ‘you who from your cowardly motives of honour let the poor girl fret and pine, instead of comforting her in her distress in spite of her parents. And it is for your sake that she has sacrificed herself—for you alone,’ and Julia’s eyes flashed with an anger that she did not feel in her heart.

‘What the devil do you mean, Julia?’ he asked, trying in vain to calm himself; and she answered,—

‘You are far too hot to reason with, and I too sad to reason, but I tell you she did it to gain money for you, that in the end you might come together again.’

But Hollebone answered,—

‘For God’s sake, Julia, do not speak in riddles. What do you mean?’

(A fresh burst of crying sounded from outside, in the voice of Gandon, and passing the door, disappeared in silence as he mounted the stairs.)

Julia continued, putting a little more comfort into her voice, since she had recovered her self-command and histrionic powers,—

‘What is the use of my telling you? You will

not believe me. This is what she has done. She has married an old, old man to get his money—for you. Now do you understand?’

Hollebone started as though a knife had been driven into him, remembering his strictures on Mrs Kasker-Ryves, and his eyes blazed with fury.

‘It is shameful of you,’ he said, ‘to talk like that, as shameful as it is in her to have done it. It would at least have been more decent in both of you to have concealed the motives.’

‘Do you think so?’ said Miss Tubbs, so unconcerned that Hollebone’s breath was entirely taken away, and for the moment he must needs keep silence for very want of words, pressing the points of his finger-nails on the table and observing the pink ebb and flow of the blood under them. It had a wonderful effect in cooling him. Much as a cold douche from fire-engines is said to act on an angry mob.

‘No, but really,’ he went on, being reduced to expostulation, ‘you shouldn’t joke with me on such a subject. You know how awfully I loved her, and I shall hate her just as much for her treachery now it’s all over, only I *can’t* begin just at present, because it’s so difficult to hate what one has loved for such a long time.’

‘Now, my dear fellow,’ Julia said clearly, ‘I know it’s no use arguing with you just at present, because you’re not fit to hear any rights or wrongs of the case, but I’ll just say my say, and you can listen and think over it.’

But Clement interrupted her.

'It's no use saying anything more to me about it. I shall never care for Edie again. One of my chief reasons for loving her was that I believed she didn't care about my money, and now, my God! look what it shows me; and even if it is as you say, and she married an old man for his money, it only shows that she won't live without money, even if she does love me; and she's betrayed the old man too, poor fellow, so there are a brace of us made fools of—and who knows how many more?—and then she goes and talks you over, because she likes you, as we all do, and makes a fool of you too, if you'll excuse me. You see I'm talking quite calmly now. I feel numb, without a bit of life in me just for the time, but it stings, I tell you. You see it sort of hits a fellow on the raw when he finds out a girl's been loving his money and not him. Only the other day I was slanging a poor girl for marrying an old man for his money, and I compared her in my mind with Edie, who I thought was waiting for me, and all the while—oh, my God! I am very wretched.'

'Well, it may be some consolation to you to know that she is very wretched too. She thinks she is dying, but that's all nonsense, and so she made me promise to come down and see how you were, without saying anything about her.'

'Wanted you to see how I squirmed, eh?' said Hollebone coarsely. 'You can just tell her, if you like, that I think her a— However,

I suppose I must restrain my language in the presence of a lady.'

'Oh, go on swearing; don't mind me,' said Julia, 'if it relieves you.'

'No, really, Julia,' he said, 'I'm awfully sorry I swore before, you know, but somehow it took me that way, and I couldn't help it.'

And Julia answered, with a smile,—

'Oh, never mind that y'know; but if you'll just let me say my say I'll go, and let you have a little peace, because I see you aren't fit to be bothered more. But really, if you'll take my word for it, Edie *did* marry that man for your sake, to get his money, and you ought to appreciate the sacrifice when you think what it is for a girl to marry an old man, more especially when she's as romantic, not to say as spooney, as poor little Edie.'

'Then there's the money, doncher know?' said Hollebone bitterly. 'But, I say, what's the man's name?'

'That I'm not going to tell you,' Julia said; 'but he's very, very rich, and very, very old, and that's all you're to know, and so now I'm off. I sha'n't get home to-night, and poor little Edie thinks she's dying, but it's only influenza. Besides which you want rest too. You've been out all day, and haven't had a thing to eat.'

Hollebone was struck with an idea.

'You'll never get to Blackstone Edge to-night,' he said.

'No; but I shall get more than half-way,

and I can go on by the first train to—' She stopped suddenly. 'Why, you knew all about it,' she said.

But he answered,—

'No, I only guessed—not that it makes any difference. She's ruined my life, anyhow. God forgive her. But, Julia, won't you stay and have some tea before you go?'

She shook her head.

'No, thanks, old boy,' she said. 'I know you'd like to be alone, and I can get some at Blythborough. I know it's no use saying more, but *really* you are wrong about Edie.'

Hollebone groaned.

'Please leave that alone. It—it hurts, you know. How are you going to get to Blythborough?'

'Oh, I'm all right. I've got a chaise from Southwold that'll take me there, and go the rest of the way back alone.'

'Anyhow, I must see you into it,' he said, and she consented.

Therefore they went together to the inn, where the carriage was being baited, and even, while the horses were put to, had some tea together and talked commonplace, after which Julia rode off, saying to herself as she pulled up the window, 'Poor fellow, he'll feel it now all in a lump!' and she was right. Anyhow, the hangers on at the inn said the one to the other, as they went back out of the dark cold air—a wind, arisen at sunset, having somewhat dispelled the fog—

'T'doctor looks a'most boosy—can't hardly walk straight.' To which another replied, 'Ay, Bill, reckon you'd be a little tight too, just after a man came down to tell you 'at you'd got ten thousand pounds a year.'

Mary Ann's ears were remarkably sharp, and, doubtless, the whole of Hollebhone's history would have been known throughout the village had not Dr Hammond's entry forced her to retreat to the kitchen; but the news of his increment of fortune was noised abroad almost as soon as he knew it himself. But Hollebhone, reaching the house once more, stumbled up the stairs in the darkness to his room. At the door a sudden rush of blood to his head and access of heat made him stagger and almost fall at full length; but recovering himself, in his need for air, he went to the window, and leaning on the sill, looked out into the night.

A stillness as of death was on everything, save that the wind brought down with it the noise that the wheels of the carriage made in bearing Julia home, and as that too died away in the distance, the murmur of the sea alone was audible, and everything was bathed in blessed darkness—not even a star glinted through the mist, only from the room below one little stream of yellow light, escaping the blind, fell like a narrow bar out into the garden—otherwise a feeling of deep rest, and as the sea murmured on, its very sound was restful, and within his brain the whirl of thoughts caused

a feeling of numbness as of an opiate; for thought drove away thought and despair, despair, so that his brain, from very inability to grasp one settled idea, must needs abstain from work, and rest. Only, he knew that the feel of the cool air on his hot face was grateful to him, and that the darkness was like coolness to his eyes, and the silence to his ears.

Suddenly, through the mist upon the sea, shone a veiled glory of yellow light, as the moonbeams, struggling to be free to kiss the earth, broke tumultuous through a rift in the fog, and drove a golden trail across the sea, and from the garden beneath, where erstwhile blessed silence reigned, burst the tumultuous flood of a redbreast's song, rendered louder by the stillness. For it is the fashion with the redbreast through the month of February, even on into March, at nightfall, after the world is newly hid in darkness, if the nights be middling warm, to offer up in sudden mellow song, as sudden hushed, its thankful praise that yet another day is safely sped, bringing it the nearer to the joys of spring and nesting.

But the sight of the yellow hazy light and the sound of the bird's strain, momentary though they were, served to recall his thoughts to him, and with a moan like the death cry of a dumb creature he shut the casement, and dropped into a chair with a great aching in his throat and round his heart.

'My aim in life is gone,' he said, and prayed to God to kill him, or at least to let him

cry, but the flood-gates of his nature were closed. . . .

'Mr Hollebhone,' a small voice said suddenly from out the stillness.

Hollebhone started.

'Who's there?' he said sharply, and the voice replied,—

'It's me, Gandy. Did she hit you? 'cos you were crying.'

'Who?' asked Hollebhone.

'Ve lady.'

'Yes, old man, she hit me very hard.'

'When Mawy Ann slaps me I don't cw'y.'

'That's because you're braver than I am. But what are you doing here anyhow?'

'I wunned away and hided fwom papa 'cos he was goin' to spank me.'

'Was he, old boy?' said Hollebhone, rubbing his cheek over the wispy, strawlike thatching of the child's head. 'What have *you* been up to?'

'I told him you were goin' away, and he said I was a laïar, an' I said no, 'cos Mary Ann said 'at a gentleman had bwrought you ten fousand pounds, an' he said *vat* was a lie too—a *d—d* lie—an' he was just gettin' out of his chaïah to spank me, on'y he tumbled back suddenly, and his face was all wed like a bloater, and his eyes standed out all over, an' I was so fwightened, 'cos he looked so funny, just like ve man vat was bwrought in ve over day, an' so I wunned upstairs and hided myself under ve bed, and when you

came in I creeped out again, on'y you was lookin' out of ve window, and—'

But Hollebhone stopped him, a light breaking in on him.

'Good gracious, child, are you telling the truth about your father?'

And Gandy answered,—

'Yes, of course I am, an' his mouf went all ovah on one saide, an' he slobbered awful!'

Hollebhone set the child off his knee, and rushing to the door, opened it and ran downstairs; but just as he reached the foot of the staircase Mary Ann ran out from the study crying, 'For the Lord's sake, Mr Hollebhone, come, the master's in a fit.'

The next few days were for Hollebhone a sort of fool's paradise, a rush of heavy wearing work, tearing alike to muscle and mind, and healthful alike for brawn and brain, making him, perforce, forbear to think. For the work of his own and Dr Hammond's were supplemented by Dr Hammond himself, whose progress towards recovery was hindered in verisimilitude by a weight on his mind. The hemiplegia had left him for a time at least very weak, though paralysis hardly put in an appearance at all, except it might be in the twitching of the muscles of his drawn face, which seemed never to brighten except when Hollebhone returned from his rounds, a thing which in itself was strange to those who observed it, for in the time before he and his partner had hardly agreed well together on

any point, except to differ, and the doctor, in pique at finding an antagonist not to be overcome either by bluster or solid argument in matters social and political, had taken a dislike to him, as old men will, finding slights in trifles that no younger man would notice. But now a greater consideration had passed itself like a heavy hand over his brain, smoothing out the wrinkles of small mislikings, and this was neither the fear of death nor of punishment thereafter, for if ever man believed in his own righteousness, after his lights, more than another in this world it was Dr Hammond, for all his obstinacy. He was a man whom everyone, even his many patients, disliked or despised for his harmless little crotchets and hearty martinetry of character, and he lay tossing on his bed, with brows knit firm and wrinkled deep, a world of anxious thoughts in his eyes.

On the tenth day of his illness he lay still bedridden, towards dusk of the day. Hollebone entered, tired and mud bespattered, wet through to the skin with the torrents of rain that had fallen, his gait unsteady and rolling, even as it will be with one who has been for long hours in the saddle and is but newly dismounted.

‘How are you feeling to-night, doctor?’ he said cheerfully, and the doctor tossed uneasily.

‘Oh,’ he said querulously, ‘I’m getting well again. I was up for more than an hour this afternoon. I shall be out for a slight walk on the day after to-morrow, and in a

week's time I shall be soundly at work once more.'

Hollebone laughed, as one laughs at invalids, having care lest the laugh should seem derisive.

'Now, my dear doctor,' he said, 'you will do nothing of the sort. You know you will not be fit to move, or at the least to do any work, for more than three weeks, and even then it will be very little. In the meanwhile the practice hardly suffers at all, tho' I says it that oughtn't. People, strange to say, have confidence in me tho' I am so young.'

The doctor passed his hand across his forehead, on which the sweat stood clammy, begotten not by heat but cold in the mind.

'Hollebone,' he said, 'I believe you are right. The worry would kill me. Not that I'm afraid to die, but it's the children— My God, I have lost all my savings for years and years in some accursed mines, and now if I die, as I must do soon, they will go into the workhouse. After I have worked for my whole lifetime to lose it all! And then they told me that you have come into a fortune, and are going to leave me, and the practice will go to the devil. I'm getting too old, and after this fit I shall be good for hardly anything. I could starve, myself, well enough, but I am responsible in the sight of God for having brought my children into the world, and if they starve, and go to the devil, the sin will be mine, and I must face Him with that sin on my soul. Oh, my poor children!' and

he burst into a passionate fit of weeping most frightful to think of—the lament of his soul for a long life that had ended in worse than—nothing.

Whether it was a generous impulse or a light breaking in upon him to show him how to spite himself, so to say, who can tell. (Let us, in Christ's name, out of what charity there is in our minds, think the former.) Be that as it may, Hollebone said,—

'Dr Hammond, for God's sake do not take it so to heart. I will stop with you, and aid you in your practice, in spite of my fortune, which is nothing to me, and for the sake of your children, whom I have already learnt to love.'

The old doctor stopped in his sobbing, and objectionable little prig that he was, seized Hollebone's hand, and would have kissed it, had he not drawn it away from very shame.

'Don't do that?' he said, starting as though with pain, for he was wondering whether he had sacrificed himself out of love for his neighbour, or of dull despair at his loss of love. Nevertheless the doctor in his gratitude poured out torrents of thanks, likening his sacrifice to the visitation of an angel, or even to that of Christ Himself.

('Better love can no man show, than that he lay down his life for his friend.')

But Hollebone, in tribulation of spirit, said,—

'Oh, please, please don't thank me. If you must, won't you thank God for—for—because

—I don't know how to express it, you know, but something or other?' and he left the room. The sight of the old man's grief had unnerved him, and he felt singularly light-headed, only calming himself by a great effort of mind. In the interests of hygiene, to which even sentiment must nowadays give way, he proceeded thereupon to his room to change his things, and it fell about by chance that he came across, in the pocket of his best coat, wherein it had lain for ten days, the letter which Gandon had given him on that eventful day which had seen his hopes tower aloft, and fall supine.

This letter, from curiosity, and from a desire to occupy his thoughts, he opened.

It bore an earl's coronet, and was from Lord Tatton.

His lordship was writing in a style of the most tragic and desperate, in a handwriting of the most sprawling. Muriel had, so he said, been informed by the backbiters and scoundrels who objected so strongly to his lordship's reform that his lordship had been, to phrase it mildly, carrying on a flirtation with Mrs Ryves, and that Muriel, believing the calumny, had 'chucked him overboard.' His lordship would, moreover, be much obliged if his friend the distinguished chemist would inform him whether chloroform or prussic acid was the most expeditious and pleasant poison for dogs, and so forth.

Hollebone, in his bitterness of spirit, sat down and began a letter, running,—

‘From what I know of Mrs Kasker-Ryves, she would be only too glad to betray her husband, as she has betrayed everyone else that she knows—your humble servant among the number—but, knowing you, it is needless to say that I think the whole thing a lie—and your lady love will probably be thinking the same thing by this time. As to Mrs Ryves, if there was anyone in the world who deserves the punishment that Dante assigns to traitors in his inferno, and whom I hate more cordially—’

But at this moment Mary Ann knocked at the door to say that the supper was ready, and that the children were waiting for him. He therefore finished dressing himself with all speed.

During the meal he forced himself to listen to the conversation of the children, which ran in this way, Maud loquitur,—

‘I wonder what becomes of us when we dies?’

To which Gandon answered,—

‘Why, you know, our stomachs and bodies turn into dust, and our souls go to Heaven or ve Bad Place.’

‘I s’pose God sewed us up and painted us,’ Maud reflected.

Gandon asked,—

‘Why?’

‘Cos else ve dust’d fall out, like it does wiv dollies,’ and Gandon assented gravely.

After the supper Hollebhone was to tell them stories, which, in his fear of thinking

over other matters, he did gladly, to an even later hour than was usual.

Nevertheless, in spite of his various subterfuges, the time came when, having exhausted every sort of occupation, he opined it better to go to bed and attain oblivion in sleep.

Of all places in the world, and of all divisions of time, bed and the night envelop the most unlucky wights. For in bed, even though one may read in vain attempts to divert the mind from dismal prospects, yet the eyes *will* wander from the page to the golden flame of the candle, seeking a solution for the troubles to come; and Hollebone in despair, having extinguished his light, lay in the dark, staring listlessly at the leaden grey squares of the windows, and listening as the wind, fresh from over the sea, battered and rattled against the casement.

‘How I hate her,’ he said to himself. ‘I loathe her as I would a snake, and yet— It seems to be getting lighter outside, or it may be my eyes are becoming more accustomed to the darkness. Yes—I hate her. She has betrayed me, and made a fool of me, for everyone to scoff at,’ and yet, deep down in his heart, he felt that he was doing her an injustice in his mind; but for long hours he tossed and turned, trying to think of other things, or striving with might and main to believe that he hated his beloved. But as his weariness gained upon him the truth forced itself upon him in spite of himself, and his last minute of consciousness before falling to rest found him

writhing feebly in agony of mind, and praying to God that in his dreams at least he might be united to her—and then a cold sweat burst out over him, and with it the blessed rest came down from Heaven and bathed his soul with its foretaste of Death.

But in the morning when all is grey, and wounds stiffen for lack of blood, came back the wish to hate his love, and through the day, in its train, followed lack of thought and striving to forget in heavy toil the labours of his mind, so that at night, from sheer weariness of body, whereto his agony of mind added three-fold, he fell into dreamless sleep, and sometimes in his revulsions of feeling he hated her, and at other times could not but love—and thus his days revolved, his passions wearing out in their regular rotation a deep groove which rendered their course the more certain.



CHAPTER VII.

Quien se casa por amores.—*Spanish Proverb.*



AS a personal opinion, born of experience, the writer would venture to lay down dogmatically that *Fifine at the Fair* is hardly literature that one should attempt whilst in a state of strong mental excitement, and I am bound to state that to a certain extent Edith was responsible for the terrible awakening that followed her doing so.

The poor girl, being perfectly certain that she was dying (though, as Julia forcibly expressed it, that was all 'bunkum'), must needs get up and dress herself within a very short period of Julia's departing on her expedition to Dymchurch. For within her mind a burning fever was raging, akin to the fury that at times seizes a caged tigress, and her distress was doubled by the knowledge that she had placed herself in the cage, and had wilfully shot the bolts. Her mind had at last succumbed to the strain on it, and temporarily, at least, she could not refrain from allowing her thoughts

to fix themselves on Clement, and with the tendency innate in all of us when we commit what we consider to be a crime, in the vain hope of finding some palliation for her sin, she cast about in her mind for some reason that should make her misdeed seem the less grievous, and so, having travelled long in the far-reaching blue desert of her mind, seeking for some little excuse for her shortcomings and shrinkings under temptation, and finding none, she must needs create a false one for herself.

Therefore she had formulated the theory that she was dying. It was, of course, a pretty, childish little idea, but then children have a way of getting enjoyment out of trifles, and Edith was, in ideas at least, a child of no experience in this life, and for petty grief at separation from her love she must find some petty remedy, a quack nostrum for her pain at heart.

But now *that* remedy was beginning to lose its effect, until, acting as an opiate does, her thinking over Clement and his virtues had brought on a fit of wild impatient restlessness that drove all thought of death completely out of her mind.

If a comparative physiognomist had thought it worth while at that stage of her life to carefully study her face he would have noticed that in the quarter-oval sweep of her face from ear to chin there was a slight deficiency in the place where the muscles of the jaw should have been strongest, and her eyes were sufficiently deep set to allow of a light's rising in them such

as had never yet had occasion to appear, but the space for the muscles of the jaw was ample, and it would need but a little contradiction to cause the light to rise into the grey-brown eyes, and it is this force of the jaw that is the cause, and the light in the eyes that is the sign of strength of character in mankind.

On the morning of the day on which Julia went to Dymchurch Mr Kasker-Ryves sat reading to his wife, reading an ordinary novel of the yellow back type. But, somehow, a disquieting suspicion had for some days been arising in his mind, and it recurred to him over and over again, after the fashion of disquieting suspicions, and with a view to setting his mind finally at rest on the subject he took the novel merely as a vehicle for giving a general tirade on the subject of the way people make love in novels.

‘Upon my word,’ he said at last, throwing the book down, ‘I could write a better novel myself. I know if I were a girl and a fellow came to me and talked as this man does I should throw something at him. Well, just think of it. That *isn't* the way young men go on when they're making love, is it, dear?’

Edith turned her eyes downwards, and a hot flush spread slowly over her cheeks.

‘No, I s'pose it isn't,’ she said, with a forced laugh, and Mr Kasker-Ryves laughed in return, a forced laugh too; but then he was a much better actor than she, and *his* laugh sounded quite genuine.

‘Oh, well,’ he said cheerfully, ‘I *do* hate

leaving a book unfinished when one's once begun it, and we may as well finish it. There are only two more chapters.'

And he went on reading. But Edith, had she been paying any attention, would have noticed that he was not reading with one half of his former elegance and expression. The fact is Mr Kasker-Ryves was gnashing his mental teeth (and one can't read very well when one is doing that) for he had felt certified that his suspicion was confirmed.

No doubt he was correct in the conclusion he had arrived at, but nevertheless he was wrong in the facts that he used to certify himself, for, had he cared to think of it, *any* girl would blush at being asked a question as to how a young man makes love—the very nature of the question calls for a blush whether the girl has been a flirt or steadfast in love—but, then, Mr Ryves did not allow such a consideration to enter his head.

Mr Kasker-Ryves was determined to think that his wife was in love, and he would have thought so even though she had never blushed, for would not that have been a sure sign of meretricious composure?

Therefore, when he saw the deep flush mantling her erstwhile pale cheeks, a hatred, demoniacal in its intensity gripped his heart. For some says it had been preparing itself, but now it burst forth. Mr Kasker-Ryves, however, was a cautious man, and did nothing without deliberation, and therefore he went on with the reading for the moment, although

the hand wherewith he held the book was trembling so much with suppressed fury that he had some difficulty in seeing the print. Indeed so enraged was he that, although he would fain have desisted from reading, he could not think of even the most trivial excuse for leaving off, and so he read on until he had quite regained his composure and a servant entered with a telegram.

He tore open the envelope.

‘H’m,’ he said, and then his face brightened. ‘Oh,’ he went on, ‘here’s a telegram from Jemmy to say that he’ll be here by the one-three train. It’s now twelve. Dear me, I’ve been reading to you for two hours. I hope I haven’t tired you.’

But she answered,—

‘Oh no, it was delightful, and I’m feeling much better to-day. I will try and get up after Dr Long has been here.’

And Mr Kasker-Ryves answered gladly,—

‘Oh, I *am* pleased to hear you say so. Only, be careful and don’t overdo it. I shall take the carriage over to the station and get some lunch there, at the Mitre, if he’s late. It’s such a long way that I’m afraid I should be too late for the train if I waited for lunch here. I suppose you will be all right until I come back. I sha’n’t be late.’

Inconsistent as it was in her, she could not help saying to herself discontentedly, ‘He cares for his son much more than he cares for me, and he will run off and leave me even when I’m ill to welcome him back.’ But that

was only due to injured vanity in her, not jealousy of her stepson.

Aloud she said,—

‘Oh no, I daresay I shall manage well enough.’

Nevertheless she grew more unhappy than ever, so that at last she worked herself into such a passion of impatience that her muscles trembled in her fierce thirst for action, and arising, she dressed herself and tried the effect that walking backwards and forwards in her room would have on her nerves. Now a good straight level walk, with say a couple of miles of hill work in it, will take the devil out of anyone, even a girl in love, for it acts as a sedative or counter-irritant; but a walk up and down in a room, even though a spacious one, has the exactly reverse effect, for the constant stoppage and turning sets the brain in a whirl, and the thoughts a-dancing like motes in a sunbeam. Thus by the time Dr Long arrived she had worked her fever up considerably.

The doctor was a shrewd man, and knew as well as she did what was the nature of her disorder, but naturally did not think fit to reveal his knowledge; and inasmuch as, in the opinion of Dr Long, it is an absolute necessity for a professional man never to abstain from giving a prescription when called in to a case, he prescribed for her mild sedatives, but ‘not poppy nor mandragora,’ etc., etc., as he knew very well, and so he let the fever run its course, allowing his patient her

own sweet will to a large extent. However, to keep up his show of authority, he reproved her gravely for having got up without his permission, and then took his leave.

‘If that girl doesn’t leave off fretting she’ll fret herself to death—only, she’s rather too young to care so *very* much as all that for anyone,’ he said to himself.

Edith, however, ate her lunch with a slight amount of relish, and since she had raged herself into a semi-exhausted condition, afterwards feeling in a somewhat more pensive state of mind, established herself on a window seat in the second library and looked out into the fog. Without, the yellowness seemed tear inducing, and made the very trees, in the dankness, have a white, lustreless teardrop hanging at every branch end. But Edith was in no weeping mood, for she was finding soured joy from the very depths of the caverns of her pensiveness. Few who are not pessimists can imagine the cosy feeling of completeness that there is in pessimism, for it has many joys of its own unknown and undreamt of by the busy optimist world without, and Edith’s vanity was flattered by the thought that Fate was against her. She felt pleased that it should take so much trouble as to be so completely and consistently her foe in everything, and this feeling of a proprietary right to Fate soothed her, and calmed her to such a degree that, trusting too fully in her powers, she determined to take a book and read. Now this determination is always fatal to one’s piece of

mind, or at least it was so with Edith. But that fact had never struck her, at least in the right light, and opening one of the folding-doors that led into the first library, she entered and took down *Fifine at the Fair*, and with this in her hand she returned to the second library, neglecting to close the folding-door, which was unfortunate, because it left her in a draught between it and the fireplace, to obviate which she drew a screen round the back of her chair, a comfortable bamboo lounge.

Clement and she had been accustomed to employ themselves at times of an evening with improving their minds by reading together various classical authors. Indeed, one of the things which had attracted him to her, in the first place, was a discussion that had taken place between them as to the relative merits of Dante and Petrarch, in which she had espoused, with perhaps a little too much warmth, the claims of the latter; in the first place, the personality of Petrarch was to her more attractive than the austerity of Dante's, besides which, by a coincidence, she had a curious love of the *Sonata Petrarca*. These literary evenings had been to both of them a source of joy, although after a time the literature suffered considerably from interludes—when Julia happened to absent herself. This, by-the-by, is a digression, but I meant to impress upon the reader the fact that *Fifine at the Fair* was full of associations to Edith—not so much from the significance of the poem itself, but because it had been the last of the

books they had thus read together, and it was full of a sense of sweet regrets and lingering kisses.

And so, with the pleasantness of recollection, the comfort of the lounge, the warmth of the fire, and the soothing feeling of exhaustion after her late storm of passions, she fell asleep, and lay dreaming calmly, without foreboding.

Julia could never discover afterwards what had occurred to change the bent of Edith's mind so entirely in the course of a single day.

'Why, whatever have you been doing with yourself, Edie?' she said. 'If you'd been reading Schopenhauer's remarks against our sex all night long, and then took it into your head to revenge yourself by a violent attack on your own account on the other side, you couldn't be worse than you are. You see it really don't pay for a girl to be took that way—always looks a little foolish, doncher know? A girl ain't supposed to have a right to ideas—on anything in particular.'

'Well, but, Ju,' Edith interrupted, 'how was he looking?'

'Who d'you mean? Oh, him. Well, he looked about as sick as a bear with a sore head, and he could hardly stand.'

'Is he—is he fretting?' she said, blushing in spite of herself.

'Why, no, it's not so much that—it's overwork. You see he'd been riding all day long, and it'd made his legs a little stiff.'

‘And did he know anything about my—my being—’

‘Oh, no, he didn’t know anything at all about it. You see you’d made him promise never to ask anyone about you, and so he hadn’t.’

‘And you didn’t tell him, did you?’

‘Why—no, of course not. Why should I have, anyhow?’ said Julia, lying with the most cheerful glibness.

It may have been that there was something in her manner that belied her words, or perhaps it was simply that Edith’s temper was more than usually uncontrollable; be that as it may, she burst into a passion of tears.

‘Oh, Julia,’ she said, ‘you are a liar—you know you are, you told him—you wanted to turn him against me and get him for yourself. Oh, dear, I am very miserable.’

Julia flushed at first with anger, but repressing herself, held her tongue, and waited for the storm to pass over.

After a minute or so of this passionate sobbing Edith stopped suddenly and asked,—

‘No, but, Ju, dear, did you tell him or not—really?’

And Julia answered,—

‘Yes, I did—I had to.’

‘And what did he say?’ very eagerly.

‘Well, of course he cut up a little rough over it. You see it stung him up, because he did love you awfully, and it *did* look as if you had only cared for his money.’

‘It’s a shame of him, then,’ Edith said

fiercely. 'And I hate him for it. Why did he ever love me at all if he didn't know me better than to think I cared for money? I s'pose he only cared for my face, and he's got tired of that, or forgotten it. That's what is. He's found someone else to trifle with, and so he wants some excuse for throwing me over after I've tied myself to this old devil. It was all for Clem, and now he's thrown me away, and will forget me. I *hate* him.'

'Oh, well, then the hatred is pretty mutual between them, in words at least,' thought Julia, keeping her thoughts, however, strictly to herself. 'But I wonder what Mr Kasker-Ryves has been doing? It strikes me the saint's become a devil with remarkable suddenness, anyhow. I s'pose that accounts for her cynicism. He must have found out why she married him, and been slanging her about it, poor girl.'

But the only thing she was able to get out of Edith was that Mr Kasker-Ryves was a frightful villain, and Edith almost shuddered at the mere mention of him.

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What had occurred was simply this :

On the eventful day which changed the colour of the world for Edith, Mr Ryves, having duly and without mishap reached the station, was delayed some four hours awaiting the train which was bearing his son to him.

Delays of any kind were dangerous to Mr Kasker-Ryves, inasmuch as they forced his thoughts inwards, and he detested his thoughts.

Whilst his mind could occupy itself he was brilliant and unclouded, but no sooner was he left alone with the Past than his mind, by sheer revulsion, flew to the Future—the Future embodied by the word ‘Shadowland’—and Mr Ryves’s shadows seemed begotten by substances vaguely loathsome and loathsomely vague. Moreover, his mind was occupied by the tie which he had discovered in the mind of his wife, and the mere suspecting of such a possibility caused a feeling of dislike to arise in his own mind, and with Mr Kasker-Ryves it was but one step from vague dislike to diabolical hatred and a wish for revenge.

From the very beginning it had always seemed to him improbable that Edith could love him, or rather it would have seemed so had he chosen to view the matter from a standard of probabilities ; but he had chosen to shut his eyes, and discarding all the knowledge of human nature that he had gained during his long pilgrimage, he had elected to make believe that he believed she loved him—and now that, like a child, he was tired of making believe, he chose to say that she had made a fool of him, and since this damaged his vanity—his ruling passion—during the four hours of his waiting his hatred and wish for revenge grew almost to the size of a monomania.

True, four hours is not a long space of time for such a revolution to come about in a man’s mind, but then it had been pending for some time ; moreover, when one comes to think of how infinitesimal an amount of time one

generally devotes out of a day to psychological analysis, one will realise that four hours on stretch is almost sufficient not only for a revolution but for a reaction—and even a counter-reaction superadded.

The fact is Mr Kasker-Ryves was nothing but an utterly selfish, cold-hearted ruffian. Having spent the former part of his life in a state of reckless libertinism, he engaged himself latterly in justifying those excesses on philosophic grounds, which had one advantage that it kept his mind employed, or kept him out of mischief, so to speak. Moreover, he superadded to all this a power of subtle character reading and a faculty for intrigues that was well-nigh inconceivable in such a man.

And so he paced up and down the platform or in the waiting-room of the station so engrossed in his thoughts that he noticed nothing that went on outside him. He was planning out a delicate scheme of revenge on his wife for his having made a fool of himself, which is what it came to in the end. And the revenge was to be no mean one, so much he hated her, but it would only end in the grave—so he said to himself. At last a light began to dawn on him.

‘H’m,’ he said, ‘the first thing I must do is to make her hate me—not only that, but loathe me. That is a good idea—a very good one, because it will show her what a trap she let herself fall into when she married me. It always emphasises a torture if the excutioner

is hated by the victim, and it won't be at all a difficult thing to do—not at all.'

And Mr Kasker-Ryves smiled, not his usual jovial company smile, but the quiet, happy smile of a man who is revelling in the thought of pleasure to come.

At that moment the train flew, shrieking, out of the fog into the glow of the station lamps, and in there burst into the solitariness a flood of passengers descending, and of railway porters rushing to meet them—a vision of touching of caps and hurrying feet, culminating and disappearing, as far as Mr Kasker-Ryves was concerned, at the sight of his son, muffled up to the eyes, swearing audibly and stamping his feet on the platform. With brightened eyes and hands outstretched he made towards his son.

'How are you, Jemmy?' he said, and Jemmy answered,—

'Hullo, dad! you here? You don't mean to say you've been waiting ever since one? You'll be killing yourself if you don't mind.'

Mr Kasker-Ryves laughed.

'Oh, I don't mind the cold,' he said; 'come on and have some lunch. Jackson'll look after the luggage. What have you got?—Jackson, those two portmanteaus and the gun-cases, that's all, and get the horses put in in about twenty minutes. Now, Jemmy, come along—why were you so late?'

'Why, the cursed train ran off the line—in this beastly cold weather, too. I tried to do some writing, but my hands got so frozen I

couldn't. The only thing I could do was to stick my hands between the rug and my knees and swear—you should just have heard me. By-the-bye, how is Mrs Kasker-Ryves? I saw in the papers you'd got married,' cos like an undutiful dad you never let me know anything about it.'

'How could I?' Mr Kasker-Ryves replied. 'I didn't know where on earth you'd hidden yourself.'

'Well, that is to a certain extent a reason. I've been in Bavaria. Got regularly snowed up in a small village where I was stopping, and all that sort of thing you know.'

'Lucky dog,' said Mr Kasker-Ryves. 'I've had a comparatively dull time of it. Mrs Ryves has got the influenza, and there's only that Miss Tubbs in the house, though she's gone to town on business to-day.'

The preternatural calmness with which the young man received the announcement certified Mr Ryves that his son had not by any means recovered from his hopeless attachment, and he changed to the subject of society scandal. For Mr Kasker-Ryves wished to give his entire thoughts to the more important theme of wife torture, and one can (at least Mr Kasker-Ryves could) blacken a very large number of characters in agreeable small talk whilst one's mind is occupied with the more weighty matters of this life.

After mature consideration (whilst he and his son were discussing lunch) he arrived at the conclusion that it would be the safest in

the end to make Edith hate him at once, for the torture would then be the more insupportable to her by reason of her knowledge of its inevitability. Arrived at this stage of his determination, it remained for him to resolve on a means of bringing about this desirable consummation to his hopes. But before he had made up his mind, Jackson appeared to say that the horses were put to. Now, by some accident, Mr Kasker-Ryves was never able to think whilst driving, and he therefore gave up his fascinating train of thoughts, and for the space of time needed in the journey home gave himself solely to the conversation.

‘I’ll just run up to my room and make myself presentable to my step-mamma,’ Jemmy said, and his father assented.

‘Come into the first library when you’ve finished. I shall be there.—By-the-bye, Parker,’ he said, turning to the servant who was taking off his coat, ‘where is Mrs Ryves?’

‘She’s in the second library, sir, I believe. She was asleep there in a lounge in front of the fire about an hour ago when I went in to put some coals on.’

‘Are the lights lit?’

‘Not in the second library, sir. I was afraid of waking Mrs Ryves, and so I only lit up the first library.’

Mr Ryves replied,—

‘Thanks, that’ll do,’ and went into the library.

Edith was still asleep, but he forbore to wake her.

‘She’ll wake up soon enough for my purposes—and just at present she may stop asleep,’ and he seated himself in front of the fire to await his son. During the interval, by dint of carefully considering the subject, he evolved from his labyrinthine brain a delicate scheme for the mental torture of his wife.

‘Of course she’s only a bit of a child yet, and has hardly sufficient mind to make a deep impression on, and that makes the matter the more difficult. I’ve always had a theory that the most unhappy age is the transition period that lies between boy and manhood, or girl and womanhood, as the case may be, and that the more rapidly the transition is made the rougher it is. So that, if I tear the veil from her eyes very suddenly, and show her the world as it really is, the operation will give her excessive pain. I’ll make the experiment in any case, and it seems to me that the most expeditious way of effecting it would be to show her what an out and out devil I am, that is to say, from her nursery morality point of view—I *will* try it anyhow. It is certain to make her hate me, whether the result conforms to the transition theory or not, and that is half the battle. Oh! and by Jove! there never was such an opportunity as the present. She’s asleep in the next room, but she sleeps very lightly, and is perfectly certain to wake up when we begin to talk—and I *know* very well no woman could resist the temptation of listening to our conversation.—Oh, here you are

Jemmy. Shut the door after you. No—not the one into the second library. I like that left open; it equalises the temperature of the two rooms. I suppose you can wait for tea a little? Mrs Ryves is asleep at this moment, and I don't want to wake her. She has only just recovered from the influenza.'

'It's rather too soon to ask you how you get on together, isn't it?' his son asked.

'It is rather, you know, dear boy, especially as she's been in bed half the time; but she has been everything I could wish hitherto.'

'I met Lord Tatton yesterday at the club. He said he'd been down here a fortnight or so, and had seen a good deal of you, and that you and she were billing and cooing like a couple of turtle-doves.'

Mr Ryves laughed.

'*À propos* of that,' he said, 'what was the name of her lover?'

His son looked at him curiously.

'What do you want to know for—cut his throat? And which of 'em do you mean anyhow?'

'Why, how many are there?' Mr Ryves asked.

'There was the fellow she was engaged to before she married you. She jilted him because his firm failed. The other's Lord Tatton—he's an after-marriage adherent.'

Mr Ryves raised his eyebrows.

'What, have they begun on her already?' he said. 'Poor little Edith!'

His son nodded.

‘Yes. She’ll have a pretty poor time of it—at least her reputation will—and it *is* rather rough on her, because she’s so young. But I don’t think you need be afraid of anything, at least from what I saw of her, if I’m any judge of character.’

Mr Ryves laughed once more.

‘You’ve judged it well enough this time at least,’ he said. ‘What was the other fellow’s name?’

‘Oh, he — that was young Hollebone. Hollebone, Clarkson & Co. They smashed some time last year.’

‘Young Hollebone was down here along with Lord Tatton the other day,’ he said.

The young man looked at his father in amazement, but Mr Ryves spoke again before his son could say anything.

‘Oh, there was nothing in that. He knew nothing at all about who Edith was—never even saw her. He is the nephew of Miss Hallbyne at the Hall, and he just came down to visit her. My wife was taken ill with the influenza on the day he arrived, and has been in bed ever since, until to-day.’

‘I don’t wonder,’ said his son. ‘If I—’

But Mr Ryves’s sharp ears at that moment caught the sound of a slight crackling in the cane lounge.

‘She’s waking up,’ he said to himself. ‘Now I must mind,’ and he interrupted his son.

‘That’ll do now on that subject. But while we are talking about reputations I may as

well say that I am deeply grieved to hear that yours is none of the best. In fact, to all intents and purposes you appear to have no morals or decency of any kind.'

The young man flushed a deep purple and said very angrily,—

'Who the devil has been telling you that?'

Mr Ryves shrugged his shoulders.

'Why, everyone in the world knows it. Now I don't care two pins about the morals of the matter. You may commit any crime or excess, or indulge in any debauchery you like, so far as I'm concerned, that is, as far as the moral side of it reaches. But, my dear son, you have an unlimited income, and I must insist on your employing it to cover your misdeeds. You can have as much money as you like, but never let any of your peccadilloes get to people's ears, more especially the escapade that made it necessary for you to leave your regiment.'

The young man scowled fearfully for a moment, and then laughed.

'Yes, that did look rather fishy, and it did me entirely, and the worst of it was that the whole thing was a practical joke of Tatton's. He got a woman and a couple of children, in a most frightful state of rags, to force themselves into a ball I was at—at the Mowbrays' you know—and insist on shrieking out for me. Of course it raised the very deuce of a scandal, in spite of everything I could do—the whole world was at the Mowbrays' naturally. But the whole thing was one of Tatton's sells.'

Mr Ryves nodded. He was wondering how Edith was enjoying their conversation.

‘It’s all very well, dear boy,’ he said. ‘As I’ve said before, I don’t care two pins about the morals of the case, only you must not let these things get about about yourself. It doesn’t suit me to have a son of that sort.’

The young man nodded.

‘All right,’ he said, and he looked at his father with just the suspicion of a twinkle in his eyes. ‘I suppose my sowing of wild oats is over for ever. If I’m not mistaken, my venerable ancestor did not rest from sowing until he was over forty, which was some years older than I am at present.’

Mr Kasker-Ryves laughed.

‘How do you come to know anything about it?’ he asked.

‘Oh, that was comparatively easy. There are still extant in out-of-the-way places rumours that lead one to suppose that you did not pass your life, dear father mine—well, to put it mildly, with your prayer book in your hands. But these traditions provide no exact dates, although they assure one that you kept it up to a comparatively late date, and so, just to approximate it, I imagine that you settled down about a year before my appearance on the scene. Am I not right in my conjecture?’

Mr Kasker-Ryves looked a trifle uneasy in spite of himself.

‘No—that is, yes, you are. Now, look here, dear boy, that was safe enough in those days—I mean to say no one made a fuss about it,

but nowadays it is different, more especially as you want to sit for the borough. But I can assure you that but for my personal popularity you wouldn't have the ghost of a chance to get through—you have the very devil of a reputation—and that is just what the other side will catch hold of. You really must do something to retrieve your position. Marry, or something.' He paused as if awaiting an answer, but his son made none, and so Mr Kasker-Ryves continued. 'I know it's rather hard on a young man to ask him to give up that sort of thing, but still—oh dear, what good times we used to have in those days,' he sighed. 'I remember,' he went on, 'I began when I was about twenty—a little less—that was still in the time of George IV., although he was then grown too unsightly to do anything of the sort himself—but still he left a school behind, and it seems to me that the school eclipsed the master. I remember one occasion—' And Mr Kasker-Ryves plunged forthwith into a recitation of some twenty years spent in a state of libertinism so unholy that it made his son shiver.

The young man listened to his father, slipping from one recitation to the other, listened at first with the somewhat shocked feeling that a young man will have in the presence of an old man who is, so to speak, taking the wind out of his sails. It seemed to him somewhat incongruous for an old man, whose thoughts should be turned heavenwards, smacking his lips over wickednesses that had faded away

into the past forty years ago, and the young man felt embarrassed and unhappy, knowing that he ought to smile and look pleased, but realising that his attempts to do so were hollow, uneasy mockeries. But as his father grew more heated and gave his dramatic and descriptive talents greater play, so that the listener could almost see the scenes, the young man positively gasped for breath, for he was a mere tyro in vice. He had been brought up by his father with the most scrupulous attention to his moral welfare, and when he sinned it had been with a due sense of the enormity of his misdeeds, and this recitation, rendered the more loathsome by the smooth, unctuous manner of the telling, caused at first a feeling of shyness, to which succeeded a sense of shuddering nausea, and then an appalling feeling that caused him to cry within himself, 'Good God! are all men in the world such villains? Is it possible that I am the only person in all the world that struggles against my passions?'

For hitherto the young man had implicitly believed in his father's goodness of heart, although he knew that the old gentleman had committed some excesses in early life, but the son, having known what temptation was himself, could allow for his father's escapades; but now, when he heard the old man resuscitating these memories in such a way as to demonstrate clearly that the sins were by no means forgotten or repented of, he was horror-struck by the revelation.

At that moment a creaking of bamboo work sounded with remarkable distinctness from the next room, then the rustle of a dress, and Edith stood before them, as pale as though the death-sweat were already breaking out over her forehead, too pale for even a hectic spot to show itself. Yet not even her lips quivered, and she was perfectly self-possessed as she walked towards the young man, with her hand outstretched.

‘How are you, Mr Ryves?’ she said. ‘I have been asleep in the—’

But her stepson was too unnerved for the moment to restrain himself.

‘Good God!’ he said, ‘you didn’t hear what my father—what we have been talking about?’

‘A hero for one of my son’s novels,’ his elder said collectedly, and at the sound of his voice Edith shuddered, and the blood rushing suddenly into her face, she leaned against the folding-door, which gave way beneath her weight, and she fell to the floor with a heavy thud.

‘My God, she has fainted! Ring the bell for some water, Jemmy,’ and Mr Kasker-Ryves flung himself in his eagerness on her body, and in spite of his fourscore years found strength to lift her head from the floor and rest it on his knee. ‘Oh, my darling!’ he said. ‘Emma — Jackson — Parker. Damnation, why don’t you come? Jemmy, pull the bell down. Oh, thank God! she’s coming to,’ and he fell to kissing her clay-cold face as a servant entered with water.

She opened her eyes slowly, and then recognising her husband, dilated them widely as with horror and loathing.

'Let me get up,' she said, and her husband officiously assisted her; but once on her feet she tore herself free, and staggered for support to the table.

'Don't touch me,' she said, trembling, and with chattering teeth; but seeing the servant standing in the room, she smiled vaguely, and passing her hand across her face, said with a forced laugh, 'Oh, thank you, Parker; it was stupid of me to faint. I oughtn't to have got up to-day. It was just a rush of blood to the head. I'll go up to my room again.'

'Let me help you up,' said both father and son simultaneously.

Somewhat in spite of herself she accepted the son's arm.

'Send for Dr Long at once,' Mr Ryves said to the servant.

'No, please don't,' Edith answered. 'I can manage very well by myself. It was nothing.'

'But, my dear, you really must see the doctor,' Mr Ryves said very gently.

'I should prefer not,' she answered.

'But I insist.'

She made a mute gesture of half despair and continued her way up the stairs.

Mr Ryves recognised that the torture was working, and returned to the library in high spirits. According to Mr Ryves's standard there is a great deal of pleasure to be had out of other people's pain if one can inflict it oneself.

‘That idea of kissing her was an inspiration,’ he said to himself, and Edith acknowledged it to herself.

Left alone at the room door by her stepson, she dismissed her maid peremptorily, and kneeling by the bedside, buried her face in the clothes. The feeling of the counterpane was to a certain extent soothing on her hot face, but more so the power to close her eyes in darkness. As Mr Ryves had anticipated, the Giant Despair had seized on her soul—a feeling of utter hopelessness, of bowing before the Omnipotent.

‘I am body and soul in his hands, and they are hands that would defile a goddess—and what am I? And it was all my fault, mine entirely. I committed a great sin, but the punishment is greater—greater, too, than I can bear. Oh, Clem! dear Clem! you were so good, and I am fettered to this beast. But perhaps Clement was the same. Yes, that is it. My husband seemed so noble and kind, but I don’t think Clement could—but yet it must be. They are all alike. And to think of what he is, more vile than a toad, because a toad is only loathsome in form, spotted and speckled. But oh, my husband’s soul is spotted with mildewy spawn that drips contamination on those to whom he opens it. I feel, as though I’d bathed in crime myself, nearly half as loathsome as he is. And I am bound to him, and he’s my lord, and he can fondle me, and speak to me, and pet me, and kiss me, and every touch and

every word must soil my soul—poor little me!’

The door had been opening noiselessly behind her, but she could not see the broadening streak of light that was stealing over the floor. Mr Ryves entered noiselessly, and standing beside her, said gently, as one would speak to a weeping child,—

‘Edith, my love, what is the matter with you?’

Silent, she rose from the bed and stood with her hands folded and head bowed, as if awaiting his command. He put his arm round her and drew her gently to him, and she never even shuddered.

‘My poor darling,’ he said, ‘what is the matter with you?’

She answered sullenly, as a slave should,—

‘Nothing is the matter with me that I know of.’

‘But tell me, my poor child, for you are a child to me, have you no secret grief that you could confide to me?’—oh, so gently spoken.

‘What secret grief can a woman have?’ she asked, as a statue would if it could speak.

‘I thought—such things do happen—that your parents might have forced you to marry me against your will, and that you loved some younger man.’

‘I married you, as you know, against my parents’ wishes.’

‘And can you love an old man like me?’

‘Should I have married you if I did not; besides, whom should a woman love, honour

(God help me!), and obey if not her husband?' This latter part was said half scornfully and half as a child would say a well-learned task.

'Well, then, my dear, obey me like a dutiful wife, and let the maid undress you, and go to bed and try to sleep. I will have the blue room made ready for myself, for fear of disturbing you.'

Nevertheless she knew from his voice that the concession was only made to show her that he had the power to make it. She obeyed his behest quietly enough, not so much from realising the hopelessness of refusal, but from numbness of thoughts, the reaction after the over-great excitement, and passively allowed the maid to assist her in undressing. Only, she said to her at the last,—

'Put the lights quite out, please. Oh, and Parker, when Dr Long comes say that I am asleep and begged not to be disturbed.'

The maid answered,—

'Yes, madam,' and shutting the door, left her to darkness and her thoughts.

Where would be the profit to detail these thoughts, which came up to the surface of her mind, like dross on the surface of a seething crucible of molten gold, until at last she fell asleep?

Mr Ryves, on the other hand, went to bed in high spirits. His mind was so tired by the work he had given it during the day that he fell asleep without need of his opiate, and woke in the morning in quite a jovial mood.

Edith, in her restlessness, was already up

and pacing her room when he went in to her, but he could see for himself what a night of terror she must have passed. Nevertheless she received him quite calmly, so much so that any more generous opponent would have admired her braveness and self-control. But generosity was an ingredient absolutely wanting in Mr Ryves's character. All he said to himself was: 'H'm. It's beginning to tell. But what a little fool she is to try to conceal her feelings from me. Anyhow, I don't mind. The harder she works herself the sooner she will die, and it must be hard work for a girl like that to restrain herself so much. It would be a relief to her if she raved a little—anyhow this sort of thing will wear her out so much the faster. *Tant mieux*'—and he began to reprove her for getting up in an unfit state before the doctor had been to see her. She accepted his reproach in meek silence, excusing herself by saying that she felt much better, and did not wish to get into a habit of indulging herself by lying in bed. They descended therefore to breakfast, and afterwards the young man departed to make a round of the estate, but Mr Ryves remained, taking upon himself the sweet task of entertaining his wife. She now wondered no longer at his brilliant elucidation of social and metaphysical questions, and during the whole morning she paid but little attention to him or the book he was reading. She was engaged in settling in her mind the exact size of the sin she had committed in listening to

her husband's recital the night before, and after a time she arrived at the conclusion that the sin was not one of a very great enormity, for she had been to a certain extent actuated in not coming forward at once on awakening by uncertainty as to her reception by her stepson, whom she had not seen since her marriage, besides which she had been anxious to prove in her own case the truth of the proverb about eavesdroppers. The morning seemed interminable, though the doctor's visit broke it a little. He, however, did not stop long, and only advised her to be careful not to over-exert herself. To this succeeded another interval of watching the hands creep round the clock face and waiting in breathless agony for the striking of the hours, until at last Julia returned, and Edith hoped to get a little relief in the confiding of her woes to her friend. How badly she fared, and how despair followed on despair has been already recorded in these pages, in the course of a conversation, to the which, if it be not impressed on his memory, let the reader turn back.





CHAPTER VIII.

Ha de vivir con dolores.—*Spanish Proverb.*

MR KASKER-RYVES was by no means inclined to let his wife rest over long, and on the morning of the day following Julia's return he appeared at the lunch-table, according to his wont, with the day's copy of the *Times* in his hand.

'Any news?' asked his son.

'Nothing in particular. Consols have risen three-quarters. Atchison and Topeka's have fallen a little—otherwise nothing in particular. Now, if you're ready I'll say grace.'

The lunch proceeded in silence for a time, until Mr Ryves began,—

'There's another centenarian immortalised in the *Times* to-day—"Died at the age of 103."'

'Seems to be rather a mortality among centenarians now,' his son remarked.

'Yes, doesn't there. It's the weather that does it. By-the-bye, you may reasonably expect to see me figuring in the list some of these days—in about twenty years' time.'

Dr Long said as much yesterday when I saw him. Oh, and I meant to tell you, it's also in to-day's *Times*. Hollebhone, Clarkson & Co.'s creditors have accepted a composition of ten shillings in the pound as a composition temporarily, so that they are comparatively firmly established again. The firm is worth about two hundred thousand pounds at least, so the *Times* says, and they are *sometimes* right. I s'pose you don't know anything about it, Jemmy?'

His son shook his head.

'Nothing at all,' he said.

He was wondering in his mind if it were possible for his father to have forgotten what he had told him on the subject the night before.

'Oh, by-the-bye, Edith,' that innocent old gentleman babbled on, turning his looks towards his wife, 'you might put Mr Hollebhone down on my visiting-list. I struck him off when they failed. He's quite a nice young man, and has a good idea of music. When we go up to town next week you must begin to think seriously of playing the hostess. I know it's rather an undertaking, but it will give you something to think about, and besides you'll be finding it very dull down here all alone with only me as a companion.'

Edith smiled—Edith could smile very sweetly when she liked, but this was rather a bitter smile.

'I—oh, no, not at all,' she said, with an attempted imitation of the *blasé* airs she had

seen on other girl's faces. It was not a bad attempt either, but still it was hardly good enough to deceive Julia. 'You see,' she went on, 'I'm not particularly fond of town, but still the country does get rather dull after a time.'

Mr Kasker-Ryves was considerably annoyed at the non-success of his attempt on her peace of mind. It was to a certain extent mortifying to him to have given himself the trouble of taunting his wife with a lover whom she did not care about, for so he had determined in his mind.

To account for Edith's coldness on the subject of Hollebone is easy, for, with the natural tendency of fair-brown haired women, who by some racial accident not uncommon in so mixed a nation as ours, have inherited a certain but insufficient amount of strong-mindedness, Edith was somewhat hysterical in character, given to obeying her moods and impulses unduly, and it had happened that on the particular morning when Mr Kasker-Ryves had broached the subject she had made up her mind that she hated her lover, and, unlike himself, when she had once decided to make up her mind to hate him, hate him she did, and with remarkable intensity—but, then, it passed away in a day or two.

Thus Mr Kasker-Ryves had to a certain extent failed, and he knew it; but such was his persevering nature that he at once set to work to build up a theory—or rather, to prove an old one. It took him several days to

arrive at the idea, indeed it would have taken an ordinary man—one who possessed a conscience, that is—a much longer time to arrive at, since it was an idea which should in nature not occur to anyone who was not bent heart and soul on evil.

The fact is Mr Kasker-Ryves's hatred of his wife had grown to be nothing less than a mania ; besides which it diverted his mind to see his wife's unhappiness, and Mr Ryves's mind wanted diverting, because, in spite of his braggadocio libertinism, there was one event of his life that he repented of, and that one memory insisted on catching him at odd moments when his mind was otherwise unoccupied.

A terrible period of tribulation of mind ensued for Edith that season in London. A rustle and glitter—a sensation of rushing in an express train through masses of diamonds, gilding silk, and insincerity—in everything but insincerity, in that everyone was sincere. In her mind there was a constant war ; but although she was pestered and pestered by men—of all grades, classes, and conditions—the war was all about Hollebone. Of course at times she hated him, but the phases of hatred grew fewer and fewer, and the intervals between whiles larger and larger ; but it was not so much that that troubled her as the fact that her theory of morals had received a severe blow—in fact, her whole moral system had been shaken by her husband's revelations, and she began to grow

cynical, which is as a rule a bad sign in a girl—or in anyone for that matter—for as a general rule cynicism is the outward and visible sign to show that an inward and spiritual crime has been committed by the cynic. That, at anyrate, was the case with Edith—and the crime that she had committed was no new one, and one that has doubtless been committed by many millions of people, namely, that of thinking of her lover. Whether it was a very great crime or not is not for me to say; but poor Edith thought it was, and eagerly snatched up the armour of cynicism, saying, ‘They all do it—I sin in a goodly company.’ Nevertheless even these magic words did not soothe her. She was very miserable, and at all times and in all places her misery would force itself upon her, and at times with overwhelming force.

She was no lady, about that there can be no doubt; for, is not the first qualification of a lady that she should be able to bear tortures, mental, and even physical, without expressing on her face any indications of emotion? Therefore Edith was no lady—but there was some hope for her—she was but just out of her teens. In a very few years she might have become an automaton—and a very pretty one at that. As it was, she was so insignificant that, although all the world knew her, it took very little trouble to invent scandal about her—of course there was a good deal flying around in the air, but hardly anyone took the trouble to think of it.

Her beauty ensured her a certain number of attendants, but they were mostly *very* young men—and as all the world knows it is the duty which every well-bred Very Young Man owes to society to be utterly *blasé*—to take no interest in anything—not even cookery, and cookery is the conversation stock of the most *blasé* of all—women and horses being almost entirely tabooed. Captain Wrigley, V.C., summed the whole matter up in this way, standing with his back to the club fire:—

‘As a matter of fact, Mrs R. isn’t worth talking about, except as Mrs R. Some of you fellows can go and make love to her if you like. For my part I shall leave her for a year or so. She’ll keep, and be all the better for sobering down a bit. She’s a schoolgirl.’

‘I laike playing with a schoolgirl. It’s some fun just to see ’em blush.’ This from another.

‘Do you, now? I say, can’t any of you fellows think of a new drink?’

‘You might try water!’

‘No! *Do* fellows ever drink water?’

And so Mrs Ryves was dismissed in much the same way by everyone, that is to say, everyone who was anyone. Of course there were some men fools enough to ‘flop’ over her, but they were all men of no account in society. Nevertheless she always had a plentiful following of men who liked playing with schoolgirls, pleasantly conceited creatures, who each and everyone of them imagined that the clouds that occasionally flew across

her fair face were either fabricated to fascinate him or were caused by his own shortcomings, and they rather wondered that Mr Ryves should place such implicit confidence in his wife when there were such *very* fascinating men about ; but then Mr Ryves was a little old-fashioned, and was used to society before they had appeared on the scene. Hideously improbable as it may seem, the well-hidden conscience of some of them were unearthed by a feeling of shame at the wrong they were doing Edith's husband. For, as I have observed before, Mr Ryves was a man whom *everybody* loved. However, to most of the members of her court shame was an entirely new sensation, and in them a new sensation took the place of pleasure. Perhaps that was why they did not 'leave off from following after her' ; and although Edith very emphatically gave out that 'followers were not allowed,' she found a certain amount of enjoyment in setting her court down member by member. To be sure she did it in a somewhat *outré* fashion, but then, as I have said before, she was not a lady, a real lady, that is, and although some people set her very *outréness* down as a mannerism—a mannerism is a striving after originality, and certainly originality is not ladylike, say what one will.

In the meantime Mr Ryves looked and smiled benignly at his wife's suitors, and this annoyed them. It seemed to them as if his smile implied proprietary pride, sneering at them that they the youth and beauty of the

land had allowed him, an old, old man, to carry off from them so priceless a pearl of promise, therefore they redoubled their efforts, and became indeed quite outrageous, until suddenly Kasker-Ryves withdrew his wife from out their midst, just as the goddesses of older times were in the habit of doing with their favourite heroes when hard pressed. The gentlemen of her court were by no means astonished, they only looked at one another, winked, wondered who the happy man was, called Sir Charles Russell a lucky dog, and waited for the papers with a certain amount of interest. As a matter of fact they showed a great deal of disappointment when nothing came of it. Mr Kasker-Ryves was ill and a great physician was called in, all the Ryves' engagements were cancelled, and Mrs Ryves had entirely disappeared, being only occasionally seen in the park. Society was annoyed and disappointed, it felt itself done out of a *cause célèbre*, and it interviewed the great physician.

'What was the matter with Mr Kasker-Ryves?'

'Mr Ryves had a complication of slight diseases.'

'Was there anything wrong with his heart?'

The great physician quite understood society's innuendo, and itched to knock society down. As a general rule he had no objection to retailing scandal, both to dowagers and at his club, but he had seen Mrs Ryves, and understood the thing was impossible, and in the

great physician the man was not quite sunk in the gentleman. About society ladies he had no objection to retailing any amount of scandal, that being indeed almost the sole use of a society lady, but he recognised at once that Edith was not a lady of that class, and did not deserve to be treated as such. Nevertheless, although he would have liked to knock society down, he refrained, thinking it excessively probable that in such a case society would dispense with his services. Therefore he answered that Mr Kasker-Ryves had nothing the matter with his heart, he suffered considerably from gout in his feet, and that Mrs Ryves was nursing him assiduously. Society was extremely disgusted.

‘It’s always the way,’ it said. ‘We’ve suffered frightfully from the introduction of shopkeepers into our midst. They know how to behave up to a certain point well enough, but after that— This is a case in point. If this girl had known her duty, we might have had a lovely divorce case. But we’re in the hands of parvenues entirely now. It would have been so exciting, too; they’d surely have had the Prince of Hesse-Katzenberg-Hohmuth in the witness-box, and it’s just possible the C.K.—only think of it.’

And society almost decided to scratch the Ryves’s off its visiting list. But it reconsidered its decision on considering its growing and grown-up daughters, and Mr Kasker-Ryves’s millions, his eighty years, and his unmarried son, although, to be sure, the son was *rather*—

but, then, young men must sow their wild oats—and three and a half millions at least. Yes, it would never do to strike the father off, and besides, George is growing up, and Mr Kasker-Ryves is getting old. Mrs Kasker-Ryves is pretty sure to have considerable pickings. So perhaps it would be as well to be civil to her too. One never knows what may happen nowadays. Therefore Mrs Kasker-Ryves was not refused admittance into polite society. Not that she would have very much minded the prohibition, for she was otherwise engaged. Mr Ryves's reason for withdrawing his wife from view was not a sudden access of jealousy, but of gout. It was, moreover, not the gout itself, but one of its prevenant circumstances. It came about in this way. By a curious physico-mental affinity the gout invariably heralded its approach with him some days before its arrival by an effervescence of the mind, in which ideas and revelations bubbled up unceasingly, and during these periods Mr Ryves saw—not the evil of his ways, for his ways had no evil, but the mistakes he had made or was making. The fit first struck him one morning when he returned with his wife towards three from a ball, the fifth they had been to that week, and Mr Ryves observed with considerable satisfaction that Edith was looking excessively haggard and worn out.

‘If it wasn't for these damned Sundays I'd kill her in a very short time from the mere fatigue of the thing, without troubling about a

man. But it's just the Sunday comes in and gives her rest enough to last out the week ensuing, and there doesn't seem to be any man either that appears likely to suit her tastes—and, good God! what a fool I have been! I might have seen all along that she is, as the vulgar say, "Intense," meaning æsthetically inclined, and that under the circumstances it was excessively unlikely that she should fall in love with any of the men one meets in society—not even a lionised author. I had imagined that His Serene Highness the Hereditary Prince of Hesse-Katzenberg-Hohmuth's titles might have fascinated her—still I might have known that she was too intellectual to care for titles, besides which, it's only a foreign one—and yet there were lords enough too. And then, of course, she would hardly see enough of any man in society to fall in love with him. No, I see my mistake. I must have some *intellectual* man constantly in the house—only the difficulty is to find an intellectual man who is young and at all handsome. As a rule intellectual young men are not given that way. However, I think I know a young man that would do—and the best of it is that he has no moral scruples whatever. I'll write to him at once and ask him to call. I might tell him I am about to write a book, and that he can help me with it, as a sort of secretary. Meanwhile I must get ill, so as to keep her in the house. Oh, damn this collar stud, will it never come undone'—for all this soliloquy had taken place

in his toilet-chamber, where he was undressing himself.

He turned to the cheval glass that stood under the electric light in order to get a better view of the refractory shirt stud. As he caught sight in the glass of his face, rendered more vivid by the strong light, he started, and then stared fixedly at his own reflection.

'Good God!' he said, 'how pale I look myself. It strikes me I must have forgotten the rouge this evening. No, it's that that makes me look ghastly. I'll wash it off and see how I look then,' and he proceeded to the washstand, and in hopes of deceiving himself rubbed the rouge off with a hard nail-brush and then returned to the cheval glass.

Before coming into the range of its reflection he hesitated for a moment, dreading the truth it would reveal; but the suspense was too much for him, and he moved into the view of the mirror and regarded his imaged self therein, and all the while his heart went pit-a-pat as a schoolgirl's does at the footstep of her lover. With a shudder at his own ghastliness he drew himself away again; but once more he drew a long breath and regarded the reflection, steeling himself to carefully note each new wrinkle and furrow and trying not to shudder at the pallor that overspread it all.

'My God, I have been mad—mad! I have been killing myself as well as her. I ought to have known that I am too old for it now—and it has been all useless. I am dying—I know it—I have not more than a few

months or days to live—and it is all because this damned girl wanted my money,' he added, with a sudden access of fury, 'and I cannot kill her, and I shall die unloved, for who will love an old, old man like me—a very old man.'

His voice sank into a strange comic-pathetic whispered sigh, until suddenly he burst into a passionate fit of sobbing, for he had learnt at last that 'all is vanity.'

Being possessed of a marvellous physique, he had hitherto gone on his way through life up to his present great age without noticing the encroachments that time and his frequent excesses had had on him. Hitherto he had hardly realised that he was no longer in the prime of life, and consequently, with the idea of wearing his wife out, he had plunged into the maelstrom of a London season with almost the same vivacity that he would have exhibited half a century before, and this attempt had consummated the ruin of his vital energies; and thus, when the ghastly truth was forced upon him, he fell a-crying, with all the hopeless pain at heart that a child feels at the loss of a favourite toy. And the weaker his body grew the stronger burnt the flame of his hatred for his wife, until he could hardly dissimulate it, in spite of his marvellous histrionic powers. In the general course of events strong hatreds or strong affections were alien to his cold, selfish nature. But it was his wife who had made manifest first to him that his powers of attracting the opposite sex

had deteriorated. When a man has imagined himself, rightly or wrongly, to be a '*devil among women*,' he bids fair, as a general rule, to drag that belief along with him until he stumbles, toothless and blear-eyed, into his grave.

Edith had been unlucky enough to deprive her husband of this pleasant conceit, and his vanity and self-love clamoured out loudly for revenge; moreover, it showed him that his end was drawing nigh much more rapidly than he had hitherto cared to own, and Mr Kasker-Ryves hated the thought of death, not only because of the disagreeable associations connected with it, but because, although he was not quite certain as to the probability of Retributive Justice being exacted in a future state, he was perfectly convinced that if there *was* such a place as hell it would be his destined abode. Not that he saw the evil of his ways as a whole, but there was one episode of life that he would gladly have changed if he were able. It was quite an ordinary story, an everyday one, that of a woman that had loved him, whom he had ruined, and who, broken-hearted, had eased herself of the woes of this life; but, strangely enough, it was only after she had taken her own life that he realised that he had loved her. It may have been owing to the fact that her committing suicide for love of him flattered his vanity—very probably it was so—but the thought of her death, when it came into his mind, would cause him such terrible mental agony as almost always to

bring on a fit of illness, even at this late date. In fact he dreaded this memory with the abject, cringing fear that a dog has of its master when he calls it sternly, with a sharp-lashed whip displayed. And indeed his very dread of this memory caused him to take the greater pleasure in tormenting his wife, inasmuch as it gave his mind employment, and kept the memory away while he watched the torture she was undergoing, or rather that he was trying to make her undergo, for hitherto he had succeeded but partially, only indeed, to the extent of making her hate him and grow almost distracted at the thought of being linked to him infrangibly. But this was not sufficient for Mr Kasker-Ryves. He knew very well his wife's conscientiousness, or, as he called it, nursery morality, and he wished to make her feel the irksomeness of her marriage ties when she would fain have broken them in favour of someone else, and he hoped thus to drive her into her grave from the mere hopelessness of longing, for hopeless longing he knew it would remain. Therefore he had dragged her into the vortex of society in the vain hope of finding a man that would prove fatal to her peace of mind.

Hitherto he had failed, and as the reader has seen, he determined on a new plan for bringing her into closer contact with a different type of young man from that to be found in society, namely, a person with some intellect. How this scheme would have succeeded is scarcely problematical, but before he could

put it into action several deterrent circumstances occurred. In the first place, he was seized with a violent attack of gout that prostrated him for the time and left him a physical wreck, with a mind like a furnace of hot desires. He knew death was approaching him rapidly, and he was filled with a maddening craving to torture his wife to death before his own end—and yet, rack his brains how he would, he could discover no torment strong enough to kill her. She was at an age when love should be the ruling passion—and yet he could find no one whom she would love.

And so the long months dragged on slowly for them both. The season drew to its close, town grew empty, and people fled to Baden or Homburg—and then the summer drifted by and the autumn came in, with its moon hanging great and golden in a black cloudless sky, looking quietly down on poor passion-torn Edith, wearing herself out in assiduously nursing her querulous, loathsome husband, and shuddering still at every touch she needs must give him in the fulfilment of her duty. And never husband before had a more tender, careful nurse than did Mr Kasker-Ryves in this wife of his, though she knew his black villainy of soul, and knew too that he hated her. Yet she nursed him and waited on his every whim, and to serve him yet more fully, struggled hard not to show her agony of mind at the torment he inflicted on her, for she could not or would not believe that he wilfully pained her. It was her atonement for her sin in vow-

ing to love, honour, and obey him when she *could* only 'obey.' Moreover, she had returned to her ancient struggling not to think of her love, in her strong endeavour to do that which was right towards her lord, and this trial was the hardest and most wearing of all. Still she struggled, and struggled bravely, and only at times, when the moon alone saw her, her tears would well over and drop from her eyes, sparkling for a moment in the pure light.

Julia, who was frequently with her, tempted her often to write to Clement.

'Why on earth shouldn't you, Edith, dear?' she said. 'You never meant to let him drop altogether when you married this old—well, gentleman (to please you), and you might just as well. It would do no harm in the world, and you could explain to him how it really was that you married this Mr Ryves—as it is he might, with every excuse, forget all about you, and when the old gentleman dies you will be alone in the world.'

And so Edith let herself be over-persuaded, and one night she began a piteous letter of appeal to him, but before she had ended it her conscience upbraided her and she left it unfinished—only, since she could not bear to tear up anything that was in any way connected with Clement, she locked the letter up carefully in the box in which she kept all the treasures that she had collected of his. The box she kept at the bottom of a great clothes-press, and this was the first time she had

opened it since her marriage, and she could not resist lingering over its contents once again. There was the necklace he had given her, and the bracelets, and the gold ring—she could not help kissing it. (*Mr Ryves was very restless that night, and he wanted his wife to get up and read to him. His step was very noiseless when he wished, and he had a knack of opening a door without making the least noise in the world.*) Edith was kneeling on the floor, with her back to the door, leaning over the box. There was one thing Clement had given her that she valued more highly than any other thing in this world—a little bottle with a great poison label—this she seized and kissed a hundred times. (*Mr Ryves had another knack, that of closing a door very, very gently, almost inaudibly.*) A very slight noise came from behind Edith's back, almost as if somebody had shut the door—that, of course, was impossible, it must have been imagination; but the shock had caused her to feel guilty, and she realised for the first time that she was committing a deadly sin in lapsing thus into sweet dreams, and then a cloud of hopelessness fell on her, and a feeling of dread, of punishment therefor.

'Oh, if I only thought that my present misery was the punishment for my sin, that I am always lapsing into, I should be happy, and certainly my husband never was cruel to me until I began to let myself think of Clement, so perhaps this wretchedness is the atonement. I wish I wasn't an atheist, then I could at least

pray that the sin I have committed just now might be pardoned—only, as Clement says he is an atheist, I must—but, oh dear, I am thinking of Clement again—I *must* not do it,' and she gathered the things into the box again, and putting in her own unfinished letter to him, she shut the box and consigned it to its hiding-place again. Of course she ought to have destroyed the box and everything it contained, but her strength of mind could not carry her as far as that; she was, after all, only a girl, and she went to bed and battled manfully against her desire.

Meanwhile a change had come over Mr Kasker-Ryves. He was pacing his bedroom angrily, and swearing at himself for an old fool.

'Every day brings me a new proof that my dotage is approaching,' he was saying. 'I might have known that she had a secret place in which she kept her love-tokens—and it has never entered my head to take impressions of her keys, and yet at one time I had them of even the servants'. I must do it at once—to-night. Aha! my dear child, now I have you in my clutches.' For Mr Kasker-Ryves could be quite melodramatic when he chose. 'I feel ten years younger, at least. Now I shall kill her—if I only have time. Oh for time to accomplish my task in—only a little, a very little. I will torture her to death. I wouldn't mind staking with Fate, my life for hers, that I kill her within the period of my life—suicide and murder excepted. But I won't let her commit suicide—and no one is likely to

murder her—suicide and murder are always excepted in bets between gentlemen, and Fate *is* a gentleman, or rather a lady. Yes, I'll do it. My life against hers that I kill her (by mental torture) before I die, and that is against Fate. I wish I knew who her lover was. However, I must be calm—I am quite agitated at this moment—and every moment of agitation shortens my life by God only knows how many hours.'

And this extraordinary old gentleman seated himself in an arm-chair and took up *Holy Living and Dying*, which Edith had been reading to him nearly all the day, during which he had been querulous and nervously trying; but now his time of trouble was past, and he felt it was plain sailing to the end, and the end was to be her death—not his own. He waited tranquilly, therefore, for some hours, in order to give her time to fall asleep, after which he walked noiselessly into the room where she slept. It was a matter of some difficulty, for during his illness she had trained herself to wake at his least movement, in order to be always ready to nurse him. Nevertheless, by giving serious trouble to himself, he succeeded in getting possession of the keys, albeit he must needs do so in the dark, for fear of awakening her with a light, and, as all the world knows, it is a serious matter to find a lady's pocket even in the full light of heaven. But by the time he had finished with them and returned them to their places the grey dawn already lent some

aid to him. Once in possession of the impressions on wax, Mr Kasker-Ryves's troubles were over, and he only needed to send them by post to a locksmith who had done many such jobs for him before. Luck was all on Mr Ryves's side that day, for the locksmith had only just returned from a sojourn in gaol—on account of a job not unconnected with locks—and being nearly penniless, was anxious to finish Mr Kasker-Ryves's keys at once and get the money as soon as possible, for he knew by experience that Mr Ryves paid well. Therefore Mr Ryves received his keys a very few days after. By this time the improvement in his health had become so very marked that one morning he said to his wife,—

‘My dear girl, how ill you are looking. You have been knocking yourself up for my sake, and I never noticed. Why don't you get Miss Tubbs to make an outing with you—say to-morrow? You might go by an early train down to Herne Bay, or some place by the sea, get a good blow, and come back by the last train at night, for I can't spare you for more than a day,’ he added pathetically.

As a matter of fact he was afraid that if she took any luggage with her it might serve as an excuse for carrying off the box which he so much desired to see. Edith showed evident signs of an inclination to rebel against this hygienic measure, saying that she was quite well, and that he was not sufficiently recovered for it to be safe for her to leave him. But Mr Ryves overruled her arguments.

‘My dear little wife,’ he said, ‘I *insist*—absolutely *insist* on your going. Just to-day I am well enough to do without you, and you must seize the opportunity of an outing while you can, otherwise you will be breaking down altogether, and I may have a relapse—one must expect it at my time of life—and then I shall not have any kind nurse. I don’t know what I *should* do without you. Now, dearest, go and arrange it with Miss Tubbs, just to oblige me.’

And so Edith drove over to Hampstead and interviewed Julia on the subject, and Julia had no particular objections. Work was very slack with her just then. It was the end of the holidays still, and what little work she had on the next day she could manage to postpone.

‘If you had asked me three weeks later it would have been different. I’ve got any number of concerts to play at—but a good sea blow would do me good. I’ve not been able to afford to go out of town for the holidays.’

But Edith answered,—

‘Now, Ju, dear, you know you’re telling a fib, and that you’ve only stopped in town to keep me company.’

Now Julia had an annoying habit of attempting to edge in a little bit of abuse of Mr Kasker - Ryves when she thought her friend was in an unusually good temper with her. Therefore she said,—

‘Now I should like to know what particular

piece of devilry Mr Kasker-Ryves is up to that he wants you out of the way—'

But Edith interrupted her, almost white with anger.

'Julia,' she said, 'once for all, and for the last time, I *will* not have you say another word against Mr Kasker-Ryves. I believe he is a really good man, and that I have been wronging him all along when I thought otherwise, and you make me perfectly miserable when you speak against him, so please don't, dear.'

And Julia answered,—

'Oh, very well, I won't.' But to herself she said, 'Good Lord! what a frightful thing it must be to have a conscience like Edith's—poor girl.'

On the morrow they set out on their trip, and I am bound to say that Edith enjoyed herself considerably in spite of all her troubles. In fact she was beginning to make light of them, and to think that, after all, Mr Kasker-Ryves was not such a frightful ruffian as she had thought him, for, to the best of her knowledge, he had always behaved in a most exemplary way, and almost treated her most affectionately. Edith's vanity always expanded when she was at all at ease in her mind, and she was beginning to think that, after all, it was possible that Mr Kasker-Ryves was fond of her. Meanwhile he was enjoying himself, for having with considerable ease discovered the badly hidden box, it did not take him more than ten minutes to find

a key that fitted the lock. Transporting the box into his own room, he placed it on the ground, beside an arm-chair, and proceeded to leisurely examine its contents. The first thing that struck his eye was the unfinished letter that Edith had begun.

A glance at the date and the opening words sufficed to make his eyes sparkle.

‘By Jove!’ he said, ‘this letter was commenced only the day before yesterday, and she has not had time to finish it. It begins “Dearest Clem,”’ and he proceeded to read the letter.

When he had got half-way through he stopped to think over it before turning over the leaf.

‘It is as I thought—she only married me for my money, to give it to this beggar when I die. Wonder what his name is—must wait until I read his letters. The little vixen doesn’t seem to have kept up a regular correspondence with him or she wouldn’t need to tell him all about her reasons for marrying me.’

The only human thing about Mr Kasker-Ryves, his vanity, was horribly macerated by this letter, for Edith did not even condescend to hate him, only seeming to pass him over as an aged invalid whose peccadilloes must be patiently borne with. The whole tone of the letter was one of piteous appeal to Clement, and Mr Kasker-Ryves’s hatred of his wife was increased out of all bounds. But words are powerless to express

his self-abuse when, after reading through many letters signed only 'Clement,' he discovered Hollebone's name.

He certainly had considerable ground for annoyance, for the letters showed him that his whole labours to tempt his wife had not only been futile on his part, but absolutely an idiotic abandonment of the right clue. He had ruined his health, and had drawn death nearer by years to himself, and all because he had with too great precipitation thrown away that clue. However, after a time the wrath of even a philosopher will burn itself out, and he forced himself to proceed with the examination of his wife's treasures. Methodically he read through and digested all the letters Hollebone had written, and with diabolical intent copied out some verses that he had once written to her. At last he arrived at the letter that gave a descriptive account of the properties and effects of the poison.

'H'm,' said Mr Ryves, 'I must venture to deprive my sweet wife of this love-token. A poison that is more sudden in its effects than prussic acid is not a thing for her to have in her possession. Suicide would be too easy for her. By Jove! this fellow is a fool to let a girl know such a lot about a poison like this. "Its effects to any ordinary doctor not possessing the secret would be absolutely indistinguishable from death by apoplexy—and you and I are the only people who know of its existence. Therefore,

dearest, I have thought it safer to seal the bottle hermetically with my own private seal, because if it got into careless hands by accident it might do mischief." What a fool a man in love is! and what a fool the girl is not to have polished me off with it ages ago. It would have been so easy to slip a little of it into my beef-tea, and no danger of a cord's stretching her dainty white throat. But she would never do that. She might kill herself, though, and I want to have that pleasure. I must say this young man *is* a fool. I don't wonder she fell in love with him. However, let's just finish the examination of these things. Wonder who the violin's by—h'm, *Stradivarius Cremonensis*—can't be real. Must be a French imitation of last century—not a bad one by any means. It wouldn't be at all a bad plan to break it irrevocably—and of course when she discovers her loss she will be in a terrible state of mind, and will, at the same time, not be able to make a fuss about it. And it will be such a delightfully wanton piece of destruction—it *must* make her hate me when she discovers it. Yes, I will—just for the fun of the thing,' and placing the poor violin on the ground, he stamped it to atoms, observing, with a smile, 'There goes about a thousand pounds,' after which he gathered up the fragments, replaced them in the case, and having possessed himself of the poison, replaced the box in its hiding-place. 'There's no time to be lost,' he said when this was done, and he rang the bell.

A servant appeared.

‘Let me have lunch at once, and tell Jackson to get the carriage ready,’ he said, and the servant departed on his errand. Having finished his lunch, he set out to find his son, who happened to be in town at that moment. With his usual luck he managed to catch his son at his chambers, just as that young man was on the point of setting out for Yorkshire.

‘Hullo, dad!’ he said, as his venerable parent appeared, ‘what’s in the wind now?’

‘I won’t keep you a moment, Jemmy,’ his father said, ‘but I want to know where young Hollebone is living just now.’

The young man whistled.

‘What’s gone wrong about him?’ he asked.

Mr Ryves looked grave.

‘Well, my dear son, the fact is that I have found a letter from Edith to him—and I should like to know where he is, so that if he answers I may know the post-mark on his letter and intercept it.’

The young man smiled.

‘The incorruptible seems to have fallen after all,’ he said. ‘The fellows in the club were betting on her—and, by-the-bye, I happened to hear young Hollebone’s address, too, in connection with her. He is a doctor in some out-of-the-way hole that nobody has ever heard of—why, I don’t know, because he must be pretty well off. What on earth *was* the name now? Confound it! I know I put it down in my note book at the time as a nice name for

a place in a novel. The note book's in one of my coats, but it's packed up.'

'Well, I wish you'd get it out again, dear boy. I should like to know as soon as possible.'

The young man looked at his watch.

'I shall miss my train anyhow,' he said, and he rang for his servant. 'Look here, Jackson, I wish you'd unpack my portmanteau and get me out the frock coat I wore on Thursday morning.'

'The portmanteau is already on the cab, sir,' the man said.

'Never mind, take it off again and get the coat. Tell the cabman he may have to wait an hour or so.'

When the man had departed, he turned to his father.

'I say, dad,' he said, 'I thought you were above jealousy, and it certainly isn't consistent with your theory of morals—or rather immorals, I should say.'

His father smiled.

'Oh, well, Jemmy,' he said, 'one can't always be consistent, that would be too much trouble; and, as I have told you, my aim in life is to get through it with as little trouble as possible. Besides which, Edith has been very good to me, and nursed me very carefully, and so I shouldn't like her to be unhappy, as she is certain to be if she commits a sin—and she will only have to wait a little while now.'

The young man suddenly became serious.

'Look here, dad,' he said, with the tone of

voice men adopt when approaching a sacred but embarrassing subject, 'I wish you would tell me something about my mother—no one knows anything of her, and you never have approached the subject. I should like to know—before it is too late.'

Mr Ryves laughed (to hide a feeling of nervousness that possessed him and seemed growing), and plunged glibly into a lie.

'Well, my dear son,' he said, 'I haven't told you anything before for fear you might, not understanding my character, be shocked. It was at the time I was reforming myself, and it happened that one night—however, that will take too long to tell in detail, but in the long run it amounted to this: I picked her up out of the streets and sent her to school, and afterwards married her. She had been a clergyman's daughter, and at her father's death her mother had taken her up to London, and after a time had deserted her—and then— However, she lived very happily with me, and was a very good wife indeed; but she died after seven years, and left you a baby some thirty years ago. Since then I have been married twice—counting Edith, three times—and here comes Jackson.'

But the story was a carefully concocted romance.

Jackson handed the coat to his master, who, having felt in a pocket and withdrawn the note book, returned him the coat, with injunctions to pack it up again. The man left the room, and the young man opened

the note book and began turning over the pages.

'Ah! here it is,' he said; 'yes, that's it. Dym—Dym something—yes, Dymchurch.'

Mr Kasker-Ryves's eyebrows came down with a convulsive frown almost to his cheek bones, his hands thrust forward vaguely, as though staving off an imaginary horror, and an expression of fear overspread his face—a nameless dread that seemed to fill the beholder with equal terror, as though one were to see the reflection of hell on the face of a man gazing into the pit.

'My—memory,' he gasped, and sank into his chair a helpless mass. His son stared at him a moment in stupefied amazement, until, seeing his father did not move, he went to him and tried to rouse him.

'My God!' he said, 'it must be apoplexy. He was too weak to come out.' Rushing to the door, he called "Jackson, take the cab and rush for the nearest doctor, bring him here at once, and then go for Sir James Ditchett, and bring him in the cab with you—hurry, now. My father is suddenly taken ill and must see him.'

Now, as a nineteenth century author is bound to know everything, from the management of the stops of an organ to the slaying of a pig, there is little wonder that young Mr Ryves, in his capacity of author, had an intimate acquaintance with the remedies best on an emergency for a slight attack of apoplexy, so that by the time Jackson returned with

the doctor Mr Kasker-Ryves was restored to consciousness. Whilst consciousness was returning he uttered some words that to his son were incomprehensible. They ran thus, in a low half-whisper,—

‘Oh, for God’s sake close your eyes. It will kill me. But the bet is against Fate. I *won’t* die, I will kill her. You mustn’t side with Fate against me—and if you look at me like that you will kill me, and Fate will win. You always said that you loved me, and that even though I had wronged you you could not wish me ill—and now you are killing me with that look of longing forgiveness—if you would only seem to hate me, or scorn me, or—anything would be better than that.’ His voice rose. ‘But it is against Fate, and I will withstand it, and live in spite of you all. Fate thought to frighten me by selecting *that* place of all others, but I am not afraid. I’ll fret the girl to death in next to no time—Why, hullo, Jemmy, I must have fainted. I feel very weak still—give me a little brandy.’

Now, brandy is the worst thing in the world in such cases, and Jemmy refused it, giving his father water instead.

He put his lips to the glass, but noticing the difference at once, pushed it from him.

‘Why don’t you give me brandy? Look here, Jemmy, tell me at once, was it apoplexy?’

His son made no answer, and at that moment the servant knocked.

‘The doctor is below,’ he said. ‘Shall I show him up?’

But Mr Kasker-Ryves answered angrily,—

‘No, I’ll see no cursed doctors. They’ll want to hinder me in my plans, and if I am thwarted now it will kill me. Send him away at once, Jemmy—I won’t see him, nor Sir James either. I *will* not, and when I say that I mean it.’

And so, sorely against his will, Jemmy had to go down and explain matters as best he could to the doctor. On his return he found Mr Kasker-Ryves calm and peaceful once more.

‘Now, look here, Jemmy,’ he said, ‘if you will let me alone now I shall be all right. I know how to treat apoplexy as well as any doctor, and it’s no use calling one in. But if you will do me a service, you can. Edith is gone down for the day to Herne Bay with Miss Tubbs. You might go down there on the chance of finding them, and hurry her back here. I must have her to put me to bed, and I should like to go to bed early to-night. She didn’t intend returning before the last train left, and she won’t be home till eleven; but if you can manage to hurry her she might be here by seven. In the meanwhile I will stop here until I feel somewhat restored, and then I will drive home quietly, and rest until Edith comes.’

To this plan the young man offered no objection, and immediately drove off on his errand, leaving his father in a state of most

supreme calm, concocting a grand scheme for the torture of Edith. Having matured it in its smallest details, he set about getting it into working order. He knew, however, far too much the nature of his late disorder to underrate its importance, and therefore, when he had rested sufficiently, he returned home, and sending for the great physician, gave him a full account of his seizure.

The great physician looked grave.

‘You must keep yourself very carefully from worry of any sort. I will give you a prescription, and call this evening when Mrs Ryves has returned.’

But Mr Ryves frowned.

‘Now, look here, Sir James,’ he said, ‘I know very well that I have had a slight touch of apoplexy, and it is no use your informing my wife of it in private. Moreover, I am determined to leave town at once and go to the seaside, the day after to-morrow, in fact.’

The great physician shrugged his shoulders.

‘If you are determined, I cannot help it, but as your physician I forbid it. It will probably kill you right off.’

‘Yes, yes, Sir James, I know all about that, but go I will, and I should be very much obliged if you could so far depart from professional etiquette as to set on paper a few hints to the local physician how to act in my case.’

The great physician demurred, objected,

and after a serious struggle gave in. In some cases it is best to humour patients, especially if they are millionaires. On the departure of the great physician he sent for his body-servant, a man in whom he could put implicit trust.

'Paton,' he said, 'I want you to set off for Dymchurch, in Suffolk, at once. You have just time to catch the last train. I have been recommended to go there at once by Sir James Ditchett, and I am anxious to follow his advice. You must find out what houses are to let furnished, either with or without attendance, and take the largest—if possible, with accommodation for Mrs Ryves and myself, yourself, a cook, and Parker. Lodgings would do, but I should prefer a whole house. You must have it taken by to-morrow; the price, of course, doesn't matter. Oh, and by-the-bye, if you can manage it, don't mention my name in the matter. You may of course give me as a reference, but I don't want the whole country to know I am there. I am really not well enough to be bothered with a large number of visitors. Take it in your own name.'

The man said, 'Yes, sir,' and without expecting fuller orders, set off at once. And Mr Ryves relapsed once more into calmness, and occupied his mind in polishing up and perfecting his scheme.

In the meanwhile his son had, after considerable trouble, succeeded in discovering the two ladies of whom he was in pursuit

at an hotel, where they were enjoying some afternoon tea.

Edith was terribly perturbed at the news that he had to tell, and passed the time that ensued between then and their reaching home in a state of feverish anxiety, and employed herself in asking the young man most minute and searching questions as to her husband's state, much to the annoyance of that youth, who would fain have availed himself of the opportunity of creating a feast of reason and a flow of soul between himself and Julia, for his passion had by no means diminished by time, though Julia was as collected and contemptuous as ever. However, at last the journey came to an end, and Edith took leave of Julia, who promised to come over next morning and see how Mr Ryves was progressing.

Edith, on arriving home, was full of self-reproach for having left her husband for even so short a time. But Mr Kasker-Ryves silenced her on the subject.

'My dear,' he said, 'it wouldn't have made the least difference if you had stopped at home—that sort of thing comes whatever one may do.'

'But if I had been at home,' Edith said, 'I should not have let you go out. The exertion of moving has brought it on.'

'Well, well, my dear,' he answered, 'have your own way, but say no more about it, and put me to bed. Oh, by-the-bye, Sir James says I must not stop in London any longer

than is necessary, so I have sent Paton down to Hailesworth to see if he can get a house in some retired part of the village where I shall not be bothered with visitors all day long.'

'But will it be wise to travel so soon?' Edith objected, and he answered,—

'Oh, yes, dearest. Paton will arrange about the travelling. He has ordered a saloon carriage, or an invalid's compartment, or something, and all we have to do is to sit in it. By-the-bye, you can tell Parker to pack your boxes and her own. We'll take an assistant cook and one of the servants, whichever you like.'

'When are we going?' she asked.

'Oh, the day after to-morrow, if that is not too soon for you.'

And Edith agreed, for she knew it was useless to attempt to oppose him.

On the next day Julia came over to see how Mr Kasker-Ryves was, but, as it was still rather early, he was not yet arisen, therefore Edith saw her alone for a minute.

When Julia heard they were going away she very naturally asked where they were going, but Edith answered,—

'I really don't know. Mr Kasker-Ryves hasn't settled yet, but somewhere in Suffolk, near Hailesworth.'

It was all Julia could do to suppress an ejaculation of astonishment.

'By-the-bye,' she asked, 'did you write to Mr Hollebhone after all?'

Edith blushed.

'No, I didn't, Julia,' she said. 'I began but it didn't seem right—and so I left it unfinished.'

'What did you do with it?' Julia asked.

'I—well, I didn't like to burn it, and so I locked it up in a box.'

'Well, of all the— However, it's no use talking. If I had a conscience like yours I'd drown myself right off—it would save trouble in the end.'

'It didn't seem right, Julia,' Edith said, 'after Mr Ryves has always been so kind to me.'

'Oh, it isn't that I mean,' Julia answered, 'but just this. Next time you marry a vain, jealous old man, don't leave unfinished love letters in boxes. Don't you know love laughs at locksmiths?'

'Oh, Julia, you are a tease,' Edith said angrily. 'I must run off now to Mr Ryves. Good-bye, dear. I sha'n't see you again for I don't know how long.'

The parting over, Edith went back to help her husband get up, and Julia returned home.

'I wish I knew what on earth to do. I'm afraid that old devil will be carrying her off to Dymchurch, just for the fun of the thing. If I were only certain I'd write to the young man and warn him. As it is I'd better let him alone, perhaps. It may do him a little good to see her once or twice, or else he may be giving her up, and that would be too bad.

I'll run down there at anyrate in a week or so and see how things are going on. If they are there, Edith will want a little advice, or goodness knows what may happen; and if they aren't, I can try and keep the young man from falling off.'

In the meanwhile Edith was helping her husband to get up. The day went smoothly round, for Mr Ryves was nerving himself for the ordeal—there was more under the surface than he chose to acknowledge to himself, otherwise the whole thing would have been excessively easy. There was, however, a slight difficulty that he had not foreseen, namely, to keep the name of their destination from his wife, and in the end he thought it best to invent a name for the place. By skilfully sending Edith out of the room to fetch something the very moment Paton returned he managed to prevent her hearing what his servant said, for fear the servant should mention the name.

Paton had, with very little difficulty, secured a decently furnished house, and had arranged everything, so that there would be no trouble whatever in getting to Dymchurch. At Blythborough a carriage would be awaiting them at the station, and would carry them safely to their destination, 'Conyers,' as Mr Kasker-Ryves called it when speaking to his wife.

As a rule Mr Kasker-Ryves objected to lying, not on principle, but because it did not look well to be found out; but on this occasion he had a double object in telling the lie.

Firstly, to conceal their destination at first from his wife, and secondly, so that when she did find out the real name of the place she should know that he had brought her there of set purpose, and not out of blissful ignorance—and he knew very well how she would hate him when she made that discovery. Moreover, to strengthen his situation in that direction, he had laid one or two slight pitfalls—the first of which had been the breaking of the Stradivarius, and the second the copying of some poetry that Hollebone had written her in one of his letters. The plan connected with the verses was delicately conceived to fit into the one of the broken fiddle, in this way: he ordered Paton to buy half-a-dozen or so of the various illustrated papers and magazines, for reading in the train, and armed with one of these he waited until the train was making as little noise as possible to say to his wife,—

‘I must say, dear, a great deal of the poetry of to-day is precious poor stuff. Just listen to this awful rubbish in the *Universal Review*, which really ought to do better. It appears to me to be a poor imitation of Herrick or Dr Donne, or someone of that period. Really we ought to produce something more worthy of the nineteenth century. Just listen.’

And he began to read the following verses, which certainly were *rather* fishy, but still one must make allowances for the fact that at the time of writing Hollebone had been very much out of his senses—oh, very.

TO EDITH.

ON RECEIVING A LOCK OF HER HAIR ON NEW YEAR'S DAY.

I.

My love did send to me a single strand
 From her great golden Heav'n of hair,
 And with it sent me her command
 That I should happy live throughout the Year.
*(How canst thou mock me thus unfortunate?
 How canst thou be so cruel and still so fair?
 How canst thou view my woes importunate,
 And bid me happy live, alone throughout a Year?)*

II.

Alas! the treacherous hair twines round my heart,
 Where I had placed it with all too great care,
 'Tis drawn so tight all other woes depart,
 And leave but grievous Love enthronèd there.
*(How canst thou see me thus unfortunate?
 How canst thou be so heartless and so fair?
 Parted from thee, thou knowst I pine disconsolate,
 Yet bidst me happy live, throughout a dreary Year.)*

Having finished reading the verses, which he had learnt by heart for occasion, Mr Kasker-Ryves tossed the magazine on to a seat, with contemptuous snort, and composed himself for a nap, knowing very well that no girl's vanity could resist the delight of seeing verses written to herself—in print.

Accordingly, through his half closed eyelids he could see Edith take up the magazine and turn over its leaves petulantly, with a little frown of disappointment at not finding the verses. Having gone through each page of it, as a last resource she referred to the index, and turned up each article separately. Needless to say her endeavours were fruitless, and

Mr Kasker-Ryves observed with delight that her peace of mind was destroyed ; and for the rest of the journey she was moody and quiet, darting occasional glances of mistrust at his face. Indeed, poor Edith was in a terrible state of excitement and impatience.

‘He must have found out my box and opened it. It’s too bad of him. I will never forgive him if he has taken the verses away—and then to call that lovely poetry “fishy.”’

But, perhaps from a sense of her own shortcomings, she did not feel any great dislike for her husband spring up in her heart on that account. Only, she was impatient that their journey should end, in order that she might visit her precious box to see that nothing had been stolen therefrom.

The journey meanwhile ran smoothly on, with no trouble to them of any sort. Paton was an admirable manager, and everything fitted in exactly, so that, except for the jolting of the train and the fact that they had to change twice on the way, Mr Kasker-Ryves hardly suffered at all, and arrived at Dymchurch, or Conyers, in the best of health and spirits. He had had to make a slight effort, it is true, to steel himself in order to bear the effects that the sight of the landscape had on his nerves as they approached Dymchurch. But he stood it very bravely. Perhaps the twilight that was falling over the land took the piercingness from the voices of the associations that clamoured for admittance at the gateway of his mind, even as it took the sharpness from

the hues of the landscape. Nevertheless it was a hard struggle, and exhausted him, perhaps, more than he imagined. For the landscape was the frame that bound in the memory that he dreaded so much.

By the time they had reached Dymchurch it was already dark. Nevertheless, so well did he know the town, and so little had it altered, that Edith, sitting beside him in the chaise, distinctly felt him shiver as they turned the corner of the church, and not having any associations connected with a house at one corner of the square in which the sacred edifice stood, felt quite certain that he must have taken cold.

‘You must send for the doctor as soon as we get into the house,’ she said. ‘You shivered so just now I’m sure you’ve taken a cold.’

Mr Ryves laughed.

‘Oh, no. I don’t know that we’ll requisition the services of Mr—tut-tut, I’ve forgotten his name. Ditchett did tell me. At all events not to-night.’

‘But you ought to, you know,’ she reiterated. ‘You shivered terribly.’

Mr Kasker-Ryves laughed again.

‘It was only a goose walking over my grave,’ he said, and he refused to see the doctor until the morrow.

As soon as they had arrived, and she had made her husband as comfortable as she could in bed, whither he retired immediately, Edith went precipitately to a little room that had

been assigned to her as a dressing-room under the pretext of wishing to make herself tidy, whereas her real motive was to ascertain whether her precious verses had been carried off by her husband. Nevertheless, so great was her hurry, that, finding the poetry safe, she at once reclosed the box and replaced it in her trunk, after which she returned to her husband's bedside without having discovered the change that had come over her fiddle. He kept her reading to him until long into the small hours of the morning, but he had a very good reason for that. He wished her to oversleep herself in the morning, in order to give himself time to make inquiries about Hollebone's whereabouts without Edith's being present. And his purpose he achieved very easily, for the same reason he had allowed his wife very little rest on the night before, and this, with the fatigue of travelling, had exactly the effect that Mr Ryves desired. It was indeed nearly twelve before she awoke, and he had by that time been up and about some hours.

Here, however, a slight check awaited him, for he found to his dismay that Hollebone was taking a holiday, although he might be expected soon to return.

This was an untoward circumstance for which Mr Kasker-Ryves had not been prepared, and it upset the plans he had formed. Not that he was by any means foiled, only it laid him under the unpleasant necessity of delaying his most effective stroke. Moreover,

he was beginning to feel uneasy as to his power of bearing the associations that sprung up at every turn of the roads, for he recognised very well that the mere mention of the place, if it had not actually caused his late attack of apoplexy, had at least precipitated it.

Nevertheless, his daring had carried him thus far, and his doggedness would not allow him to turn back. Moreover, the frenzied hatred of his wife supported him in his waiting, and '*tout vient à lui qui sait attendre.*'





CHAPTER IX.

Journeys end in lover's meetings
Every wise man's son doth know.

SHAKESPEARE.

IF one were to view Hollebone's case from his own point of view, one would find it difficult to deny that he had been very hardly used by Edith.

Believing that he was ruined, she had calmly and quietly thrown him over and married a millionaire, and what made it worse, she had never even broken off her engagement with him.

That was the long and short of it, viewed dispassionately, and he saw very plainly that she was so mean and despicable a character that it was absolutely his duty to loathe and renounce her, to drive her very image from his heart. That was a debt he owed to society, and yet he could not bring himself to pay it, and it remained unpaid throughout the spring on into the summer—past it, and now the autumn was wending its way through

the land, and still her image remained un-effaced in his heart. Perhaps its outlines were a little softened by the friction of time passing over it, but that very softness rendered it the sweeter and the more seductive—for was it not his duty to contemn her, inasmuch as it is the duty of every man to despise another who has committed a crime, and is it not the greatest of crimes to break a true man's heart and ruin his life—to ruin it, not to take it, but to maim it, and make it drag out its existence in a crippled state?

'For,' as he said to himself continually, 'if it were not for this cursed passion for a wanton, heartless girl I might now be studying hard, benefiting mankind and the great cause of science, and paving the way to greatness for myself. But as it is, this love, this opiate emasculates me and paralyses the engines of my brain. I can do no work, and yet it will not let me rest, wearing me out with longing for the unattainable—for what is worthless even when attained.' And thus the months rolled round, and found him and left him still at Dymchurch, working steadfastly at his practice—steadfastly, and yet endlessly—for to what end should he tend? He was rich, richer than he needed to be now. That was part of the delightful irony of Fate. Some people are, as all the world knows, born with a silver spoon in their mouths, but then, what was the use of it to Hollebone? He did not in the least wish for money, and by natural consequences money came pouring in—here,

there, and everywhere. The house of Hollebone, Clarkson & Co. had never had such runs of luck as it had during that half-year. A patent he had taken out some years before for making turmeric a fast dye was suddenly taken up by an American house, who offered him a tremendous sum for his patent rights. Moreover, the Dymchurch practice grew under his auspices, but of that he was glad on account of the benefit that accrued to old Dr Hammond, whose health seemed materially improved.

Towards the end of September there came a letter from his Cousin Kate, at Blackstone Edge, to say that his Aunt Joan was seriously ill from a cold she had taken, and then, a few days later, a telegram begging him to come up and see his aunt at once, as her illness had taken a turn for the worse, and she might be expected to die at any moment.

Hollebone showed the telegram to his partner, who willingly assented to his going.

‘I can manage the practice very well single-handed just now. I’m feeling so much better. If I were you I should take a regular holiday, before the heavy winter work begins. It will set you up. Say three weeks. I shall be able to get along well enough without you for that time.’

And Hollebone answered,—

‘Oh, thank you very much, Dr Hammond, but I will come back as soon as I can; it won’t do to let you break down.’

But Dr Hammond laughed.

‘Oh, I am very well now—better than I

have been for a long time—and I insist on your taking a fortnight at least.'

And Hollebhone consented, on condition that he should be sent for as soon as Dr Hammond felt any strain from the work.

On arriving at Blackstone Edge he found his aunt in a much worse state than he had expected, and his practised instinct told him that she could hardly be expected to live through the night, for congestion of the lungs had set in long before, and now her delirium was at its height. His prediction was verified, for before morning she was dead. He and his cousin were watching with her when the end came; and although his own grief under ordinary circumstances would have been not unmeasured, yet Kate's agony of mind was so terrible to see that it entirely unnerved him. She abandoned herself, indeed, so entirely to her anguish that he was at last obliged almost to use force to drag her from the room. Such pain of mind he had never witnessed before—it seemed as if every sob would shake her to pieces.

Nor was her grief by any means feigned, for somehow Miss Hallbyne's gentle sweetness had won its way to her heart, whilst she, unaware of its presence, was still hoping for her death, and not even hoping alone but praying therefor.

Be that as it may, Hollebhone had much ado, when the day of the funeral came, to keep her from throwing herself into the grave with the coffin. The whole country-side was there to

do honour to Miss Hallbyne, and at sight of Kate's grief the women, and even the ladies wept outright—and never before did men think themselves, ay, and swear at themselves some five minutes later, for being such blasted sentimental fools as those who happened to see her then.

After the funeral there remained much for Hollebone to see to, for he and Kate were the sole remaining relatives of Miss Hallbyne. As for Miss Hallbyne's fortune, after several bequests to servants and friends had been deducted, there remained nearly a quarter of a million of pounds, valuing the Hall and grounds at a very low rate, and this was to be divided equally between Kate and Hollebone, in whatsoever manner they should agree to between themselves as expedient and convenient. Thus was Hollebone, almost unwillingly, again possessed of another by no means inconsiderable supplementary fortune. It was as if at his birth Fate had thrust the silver spoon into his mouth out of sheer wantonness. In the meantime there was a good deal for him to do—small matters connected with the estate, and even household orders, to which his cousin was too grief-stricken to attend. Kate had always held the post of housekeeper to her aunt, and the servants, finding her now too distracted to give them any attention, came to Hollebone for advice, to which it is needless to say they did not attend; and it was the same with the gamekeepers and the land steward—in fact he was

suddenly dropped into the position of a lord of the manor, without the least idea of how to discharge his duties, until, in the course of a single week, everything was in an inextricable muddle. At the end of that time, however, Kate's grief allowed her once more to take an interest in the affairs, and as if by magic confusion vanished before her touch, in a way that made Hollebone feel excessively stupid and ashamed of the way he had mismanaged everything. Moreover, when the press of affairs was off his hands, and he had nothing to do but to write a few letters to the lawyers who were arranging the probate of the will, it suddenly dawned upon him to doubt the propriety of his remaining in the house any longer. But the remembrance of the fact that his cousin was in love with him shot into his mind and drove away all thoughts of that. She was very lovely, and seemed to have grown more so since he had seen her last, and somehow a flirtation would do very well to fill up the week that Dr Hammond had allowed him as holiday. A week was hardly time to do anything in, or to go anywhere for that matter. It would, moreover, serve Edith right if he were to go a little further in the matter than a mere flirtation, and Kate's beauty certainly seemed to grow upon him—it had that quality about it. Besides which, it would really be doing her a service to occupy her mind and keep her from thinking of the loss of her aunt. Thus he remained lounging about the Hall, and there could be no doubt

that his cousin loved him—it was manifest in her every action—and Hollebone took great joy in watching how she treated him ; and so the days flew round, and love itself springing up in him, for his cousin's beauty was enhanced by the longing at her heart, in which was a void left by her aunt's death. Thus on the last day of the week Hollebone found himself in the evening seated in a chair near the fire, with his eyes seeking in vain to discern his cousin's figure, as she sat a little remote from the light that the fire threw out—for it was the beginning of November at the time, and late in the evening at that, yet the lights were not lit. They had been talking of things indifferent, but yet with softened voices. Outside, the wind was sobbing, and rising and falling, wailing and throbbing mournfully, like a soul longing after the impossible, and even at times shrieking shrilly as it drove its way into some crack or cranny, rising and falling rhythmically like the beating of a great pulse, with a sound that forced itself on the ear, making one warn oneself to be content with the things that be, howsoever unfortuitous, lest in venturing forth on some new enterprise one should lose one's way in the outer darkness, at the mercy of the blustering wind. So the wind seemed to cry to Hollebone, but at the same time his heart was filled with a vague, mighty longing.

'Through the winter we are so exposed here that the wind is never still—never,' Kate said suddenly, but oh, so softly, so gently,

her voice betraying by its modulation the desire in her soul, as though she would have had the words tell him more than they said.

His lips were even then trembling to form the words to tell of his own love for her, for the love within him was groping vainly round in its blindness, groping for someone to catch and clasp, and to him it seemed as if she, with her fairness of form, her gentle sadness of soul, and softness of voice, was the woman he was seeking. The 'never' of her speech called up an echo of a 'never' that he himself had so often enunciated of late months, and at this moment, when, had he spoken the words he was trying to frame, the course of their lives would have turned—who knows to what?—the fire shifted with a grating noise, and a brave shower of sparks shot downwards from underneath the grate, whilst up the chimney a flickering flame danced and trembled and then died away, and with it died away his love for the silent figure that it lit up for the moment. For that shifting of the fire had brought into his mind a host of reminiscences that had for the time almost entirely faded.

'It is just a year ago,' he thought, 'since I saw the fire shift like that. Yes! to-morrow evening it will be just a year, and that night was the last night I saw my love, and I shall never see her again—never, never, never,' and it seemed as if the wind without had caught the word on its rustling wings, as, with a great

sigh, it buffeted past the house end and left momentary silence behind it.

‘I shall never see her again,’ he said once more, ‘never hear her sweet voice on the air, never mark the oval sweep from ear to chin, never look into the deep, true eyes, never see the lights and shadows play in her hair, never catch her little frown and shake of the head, meant for me alone to see when there were other people by.’ And every little trick of her expression and manner of shooting glances through her dark eyelashes came back to him with startling clearness, till once again the world without seemed darker by the contrast. And then another thought forced itself upon him.

‘She has been very false to me,’ he said, ‘wanton and untruthful, and she has ruined my life, and yet how easy it is to be the same, for is it not possible that I have in the same way bruised and torn poor Kate’s heart. And yet Kate has never said she loved me, or I that I loved her.’ Nevertheless, he knew that every word she had of late said to him, and every look of hers that he had caught, had made manifest and had been meant, half involuntarily, to express her love for him, and he knew he had not been entirely guiltless of responding.

‘What a brute I have been!’ he said to himself. ‘As bad, every bit, as Edith; and yet what can I do to make amends to her? If I professed to love her it would be even worse. The best thing will be to leave at once, and hope she will forget in time.’

Indeed Kate's heart was almost bursting with her love, and as she sat still in her chair she drove her finger-nails into the soft white palms of her hands in her agony of mind.

'I shall have to return to Dymchurch to-morrow, Kate,' Hollebone said as gently as possible.

'Oh, don't, please, don't,' she said suddenly, with such anguish of tone that each word struck his heart and made it quiver. He had sacrificed her feelings on the altar of his vanity, and the pangs she suffered exacted a heavy penalty from him. Under the circumstances he thought it kinder not to notice what she had said.

'You see,' he went on, 'I must get back soon, or poor old Dr Hammond will be breaking down altogether,' and as if to aid him in his difficulty a servant came in at that moment with a telegram for him. He held it to the light of the fire and read it. It ran :—

'Please come back at once. Have had serious accident. HAMMOND.'

'Ah, well,' Kate said, with forced cheerfulness, 'I suppose you will have to go. But you will not be able to get off to-night. The last train is already gone. It is nearly seven—at least it will have gone by the time you reach the railway,' and Hollebone assented, in a voice that Kate knew rung the death bell of her hopes. Nevertheless, in forlorn hope, she was unusually fascinating and brilliant that night—so much so indeed that he for a

moment hesitated in his determination, and indeed, although he set forth almost before daylight next morning, yet even on the journey he wavered several times. It would have been so convenient, pleasant, and above all things expedient, to tell his cousin that he loved her, and to ask her to marry him. It would be like life itself to her, and his life was already finished, or at least the sweetness of it was over, and only the dregs remained. Why not go back to his cousin, marry and settle down as a country gentleman to the end of the chapter? Why not? Well, to be sure, he had taken a through ticket to Blythborough, and his luggage was labelled there, and it would be a horrible nuisance to stop it. That was his principal reason for not returning to gladden Kate's heart, and besides, an afterthought came to back up his resolve, poor Dr Hammond was waiting for him, and the practice would be ruined if he turned back—and the train rattled on through the country, with provoking noise and ostentation, as it seemed to him, and yet covering little ground. There was nothing whatever in the paper. He read everything, even the leading articles and the advertisements.

‘Good Lord, what an annoying thing a newspaper is,’ he yawned. ‘Whenever one wants something to occupy one's mind nothing ever happens, not even a collision or an Irish Member to call Mr Balfour a bloodthirsty murderer. Only two advertisements in the agony column, and both in cipher. Well,

there's court and society. "Her Majesty the Queen drove out to-day accompanied by—" Oh, well, that's court. How about society? Nobody's in town. Hello! "We regret to announce that Mr Kasker-Ryves, the eminent philanthropist and leader of society, whose wife's entertainments were such a feature of last season, had a slight attack of apoplexy on Monday last at his town house in Park Place, where they have been detained on account of his indisposition. They left town on Friday for their Yorkshire estate, where Mr Ryves, junior, has been entertaining the usual large number of guests for the shooting." Well, well, Edith seems to be going the right way to work to kill her husband, becoming a leader of society, and all that sort of thing. It's funny that a girl who always seems so tender and true in every word she said can be such an incarnate fiend. However, I'm glad I left Blackstone Edge as soon as I did. I shouldn't like to see her again. I wonder how it is I didn't hear they were down there. They must have been at Blackstone Hall since Friday, and it's Tuesday to-day.'

By this time, however, he had arrived at the third change of trains in the journey, and here he fortified himself with a society magazine and a luncheon basket, and thus provided he journeyed tranquilly on to Hailesworth, where the fifth and last change occurred, and at last he sat in the exaggerated tramcars that do duty as trains between that town and Blythborough. Nevertheless that paragraph in the paper had

had a more serious effect on his mind than he cared to acknowledge or think of. Somehow the seeing her name in print had given his nerves a shock that no amount of thinking about her could possibly have caused, and it made him feel ill and more than ever tired of his life. Arrived at Blythborough, he found Gandon awaiting him on the platform. The day was not yet so dark but that he could see that Gandon's face was decidedly discoloured about the mouth.

'Hello, Gandy!' he said. 'You here all alone?'

'Well,' that youth replied, 'Jim is with me, but he's in the White Hart. He can't stand any more. They've been treating him.'

'Who have?' Hollebone asked.

'Oh, some people at the White Hart. We've been waiting ever since two o'clock expecting you—and then a lot of people came in and asked him to tell about pa's accident, an' he did, an' they all treated him—and then some more came in, and *they* treated him—and now he can't stand.'

'But tell me what has happened to your father.'

'Oh, yesterday Mandalay was ill, and pa thought he had better not put him in the chaise—and so he rided on your horse, the black one, and it hadn't been out for two days, and so it was rather wild, and before he had gone half a mile it knocked him off an' kicked him, and broke his arm—and pa's awfully bad. Dr Jenkins came over from South-

would and set his arm, but he wants you. An' I cried when they carried pa in, 'cos he'd fainted, and I was frightened, but an old gentleman what's taken the house next door to us gave me sixpence not to cry, and then he bound pa's arm up; but he wouldn't let his wife come in, for fear she should faint—he made her go indoors. An' so to-day Jim made me have a drink, and it costed twopence—and they gave me thrippence and two ha'pennies back, and I put the three pennies in a chocolate machine—but the ha'pennies didn't get anything out.'

'All right, old boy,' Hollebone interrupted. 'What sort of a thing have you got to carry us back?'

'Oh, they've sent the chaise, with your horse in it, sir,' the porter answered for Gandon, who had seized the opportunity to fill his mouth with chocolate, and consequently could only gurgle; 'but the horse is awfully wild. Dr Hammond's man has been lathering it so, I doubt if you'll get back safe. You'll have to drive yourself. Jim is too drunk to see between a five-barred gate, sir.'

Hollebone laughed.

'Oh, I'll get the brute home fast enough. It won't have time to stop and kick. The road's sure to be pretty clear.'

'Why, yes, sir,' the man answered. 'Nothing has passed going that way this last hour and a half except the carriage of the old gentleman that's taken the Widow Waters's house, next door to yours in Dymchurch. His name's

Paton, I think. They say he's a millionaire, and he's got a young—'

'Never mind that now,' Hollebhone interrupted him. 'Just throw my things into the chaise anyhow. I suppose the horse is in?'

'Why, yes, sir; we've kept it in to meet every train. Dr Hammond is in a mortal hurry to see you. He's afraid of gettin' delirious before you come, and he wants to give you directions a bit.'

'All right,' said Hollebhone. 'Put the things in. Gandy, you can't come. You must get someone to take him over, Jones, I daren't take him. Brunswick's like a devil when one lets out at him, and I'll get him home in half an hour.'

'You'll have to mind the hill where it turns at the trystin'-tree corner. It's a square turn, and the brook runs across just beyond.'

Hollebhone laughed.

'Oh, I've taken him round there before at a gallop.'

'But you hadn't got the chaise then, sir, and he ain't used to it, and there might be someone in the way or comin' round the trystin'-tree corner.'

'Oh, well, they'll have to risk it, then,' said Hollebhone recklessly.

As a matter of fact he was feeling more and more repugnance at the thought of the hard work before him, and at the dreariness of his own life, and an upset at that corner, at a gallop, would mean death—a rattling finish. It was a pleasant idea. At the door of the

White Hart a small crowd was collected, admiring the antics of the black horse—a great coffin-headed lump of coal, with a singularly suggestive trick of throwing his eyes to one side and exhibiting bloodshot whites. The animal was already in a state of nervous fury that needed all the combined energies of the hostler and the village blacksmith to control. Hollebhone and his luggage were in the dog-cart in a moment, and having the reins well in hand, with a good feeling of the animal's hard mouth, he delivered a cut with his whip that roused the animal's temper beyond endurance, and with a bound forward that hardly gave the men at its head time to evade the wheels they were away, to the imminent terror of a couple of geese that were inspecting the proceedings authoritatively, after the manner of geese.

The horse had only been in Hollebhone's possession a month, he having bought it in place of his former horse, whose wind he had ruined in galloping off in answer to a sudden call to the house of the local baronet, whose leg had been broken in the fall of a tree. Nevertheless he was well aware of the staying qualities of the animal, which would with little inconvenience have galloped the whole way. But Hollebhone was anxious to nurse it for the last mile and a half, of which the half mile home was down hill, with a stiff slope to end and a perfectly rectangular turn at the bottom, at one corner of which turn a hundred-year oak threw its branches out over the road. This

tree was used and known as the trysting-tree, to which end some benevolent person had erected a stone bench, seemingly with the intention of providing a speedy and certain means of suicide for any vehicle coming down the hill at more than a walking pace. By means of judicious nursing Hollebhone had fretted the horse, which at all times hated running in harness, into a state of mind that rendered the creature perfectly frenzied—its off fore-leg was overflowed with the foam that flowed from the animal's jaws until it seemed streaked with white from shoulder to fetlock. Thus the last mile before the hill, when he had given it its head almost free, went by, a mere flash of hedgerows and branches overhead, his hat gone, and the wind whistling through his hair, and a great red and golden glare of cloud-laced autumn sunset in his eyes.

'This is certain death,' he said to himself, with a joyous laugh at the feeling of the air on his face. 'By Jove! it's a fine sort of way to go out of the world. Brunswick is sure to come to grief over the lover's seat, and my neck will be broken against the tree. Ah! here we are at the hill. Now we'll go like the devil. Hullo! there's an old fellow and a girl at the trysting-tree. It's better than a young fellow and a girl. She'd throw him over for the fun of seeing him squirm—just as Edith has done me. I wonder what Edith would say if she could see me take that corner. She would laugh. It would tickle her vanity to think I'd killed myself on her account.

Then, by God, I'll go safe round the corner just to spite her. I've got plenty of time to get Brunswick under control again, though it wouldn't do to stop on the hill. Now then you brute. Ah! he feels it, he's not got his head. I can do it. I wish Edie *could* be here to see. It would take her vanity down a peg just to see I don't kill myself—damn her. Hullo! what's gone wrong with that old bloke on ahead? He must be drunk. Why, he's down. Thank goodness there's room to get by. That girl's game—she's lifting him out of my way. Wonder what's wrong with him? Can't stop to see. Now for it. God help me! It's her birthday to-night. I—I wouldn't like to die then. It doesn't seem fair to her, because she does love me, and has sacrificed herself for me, as Julia said. Now—ah! thank God! Brunswick's done it!

(The girl had looked up as he tore past, with his hair flying back, his face glowing in the red light of the day, his eyes blazing like live coals, and with a scowl on his face that ill-suited one who is to die immediately. But the great foam-flecked horse turned the corner with its legs spread all four aside under it, and its body hanging inwards as it turned. The light dog-cart swung round behind, with both wheels off the ground, and for a moment the profile of the rider flashed out against the dark background formed by the bark of the trysting oak for a moment, and then the hedge-row hid it from view. Nevertheless she *could* not faint, only her power of movement for

a moment—or was it a century?—seemed stopped with the beating of her heart.)

In three minutes after turning the corner they were in front of Dr Hammond's house. Fortunately the horse stopped of its own free will, for I do not know which was trembling more violently, the horse or its driver; and Hollebone was thankful that some moments elapsed before someone came to open the door, and even then it needed all his will power for him to force himself to move. Practically speaking there was nothing to tremble about. He had been very near death, had looked it in the face several times before that, for a chemist with a turn for dangerous experiments carries his life in his hands at all times. But that is of course different from wilfully sacrificing oneself. This was an experiment of another kind, to find out how far his love for Edith influenced him. Now he was trembling at the discovery it had resulted in.

At the sound of the wheels stopping at the house little Maud had run to the window, and recognising Hollebone, she ran and opened the street door. At the sight of her Hollebone recovered himself with a start.

'Wait a minute, Maud,' he said; 'don't come near Brunswick. He's rather wild. Hullo, you, sir,' he cried to a gentleman who was airing himself in his shirt sleeves on the step of the house next door, 'would you be kind enough to hold the horse while I get down?' and the man came forward after

a moment's hesitation and held the horse's head for him. 'Thank you,' Hollebone said as he descended. 'Pray hold it a moment longer. Oh! there you are, Mary Ann. Just see about someone to take the horse up to the stable. Now then, Maud, how is your father?' and without waiting for a reply he ran up the stairs with professional softness of tread.

Mary Ann followed him, for a crowd had by this time collected to admire the horse that had come down the hill at a gallop, as the postman, who had seen him turn the corner, said, and a man was soon found to take the horse to the stables.

'There ain't no lights, sir,' Mary Ann said, 'cos I've been with the master all day, and that housemaid ain't no use at all. The master's precious bad, and he's only holding up to see you. He'll go after that, right dead away. Leastwise so that Southwold man said, but he ain't of much account.'

In the doctor's room there was only one candle lit, but even by that faint light Hollebone could see that his partner was fearfully changed. But before he could speak Dr Hammond opened his eyes, with a smile of recognition.

'Thank God, you've come, Hollebone. Now I can die easy. I'm done for, I know it. Now be quiet. I shall be delirious in a moment. I've held up until you came, but it won't do longer. You'll find everything about the round in the day book. It's pretty

much as it was when you left. Don't let Jenkins get a hold on the practice, that's all. You can't touch me. I'm in Jenkins's hands. Professional etiquette, you know. But don't let him take the bread out of the children's mouths. For God's sake don't let the children starve. Send them to a decent school, and Gandon will pay you back when he's a man. Promise not to let them go to the devil. It is mean of me, I know, but you are a rich man, and I'm a poor devil, without a penny in the world. Promise—oh, do, for the love of God.'

'Yes, yes, I will, doctor,' Hollebone said. Somehow his throat wouldn't work well, but taking a fresh start, his voice came out with a jerk. 'But you'll get over it well enough.'

It was all he could find to say. But Dr Hammond laughed longer and louder than the remark seemed to call for.

'Get over it!' he said. 'I like that—get over it! Look at my right hand. I can't move it, and the left is broken. You know well enough what's wrong with the right. I may be dead by to-morrow. My wife had a sister, and she went to the devil. She left this village, and no one ever heard of her again. I shouldn't like that to happen to my children. Get over it! I like that,' and he began to laugh again. 'Get over it!' he went on suddenly. 'If I was like that old beggar next door—he isn't a beggar, though, he's a millionaire—well, he's got enough diseases to kill nine cats, and that's a hundred

—yes, a hundred-and-eight lives—if I was him I might get over it. He *ought* to die every minute. Sir James Ditchett wrote to me a diagnosis of him—unprofessional of Sir James, very. But then he's a millionaire, and he's got a young wife, who's nursing herself to death over him. Look here, Hollebone, you must take care of him. Don't let him die, and he'll pay like the devil, and it'll all be so much for the children when I've—got over it! Damn it! I say, Cameron, I'm glad you've come to relieve me—ninety-eight cases of cholera in the regiment, and not a man'll get over it. I'm in for something too. I'm going to invalid and go home. Once I'm out of this blasted climate I shall get over it. Ha, ha, ha!' and he began to laugh, and laughed on until a gurgle in his throat stopped him suddenly. At that moment Mary Ann knocked at the door.

'If you please, sir,' she began, but Hollebone stopped her.

'Look here,' he said, 'the delirium has come on. Has Dr Long—Jenkins, I mean, given a prescription in case it should?'

'Yes, sir,' he has, and Haner's made it up, but that Southwold man ain't—'

'Never mind that,' said Hollebone, interrupting her effusion of loyalty. 'He's Dr Hammond's physician at present, I'm not. Not that either of us are of much good, I'm afraid.'

Mary Ann put her apron up to her eyes and began to cry loudly, but Hollebone silenced her.

‘Look here, Mary Ann, either be quiet or leave the room. Give me Dr Jenkins’s prescription.’

‘Oh, if you please, sir,’ said she, suddenly recollecting, ‘the gentleman from next door’s sent in to say he’s had another fit, and will you go in at once? They had to carry him home from the christenin’-tree.’

‘I’ll go at once,’ said Hollebone. ‘Look here, Mary Ann, you’re a sensible girl, and can do very well without me for the minute, just do what Dr Jenkins has told you to do. Is it the gentleman that has taken the house next door?’

‘Yes, sir,’ Mary Ann answered; ‘he’s mortal bad. They say if he had his rights he’d be dead long since, poor gentleman. But his wife do nurse him so, it’s quite painful to see. Never gives herself a moment of spare time, and up all night too. His servants say she’s the tears in her eyes all day long—and it do seem a pity, too, for her to kill herself over an old man that it’s common talk can’t live more than a few weeks at most. It’s a sinful shame, I say, and the sooner he’s dead the better. Not but what the old gentleman’s a nice enough old fellow in his way, and bound up the doctor’s arm in a way that made that Southwold man compliment him; but then *he* was only butterin’ him ’cos he hoped to get him—but he ain’t. You have, sir, and that’s one comfort,’ and Mary Ann began to abuse the rival practitioner.

Hollebone had meanwhile been busying

himself with Dr Hammond, in order to leave him comfortable, and at this point he departed without giving further heed to Mary Ann. At the door of the other house he was met by the man who had held his horse for him. The man was more complaisant now, and he said,—

‘Oh, if you’re the doctor, will you please walk upstairs? Mr and Mrs Kasker-Ryves are both in the bedroom.’

Ten stairs is hardly time to prepare oneself for a frightful shock. Yet that was all he had to prepare himself for the ordeal—besides, *they* creaked, and creaky stairs are distracting at any time. But in spite of that he managed to enter the room in a manner that excited the admiration of Mr Kasker-Ryves, who viewed him very keenly indeed. Mr Kasker-Ryves had had candles lighted to an enormous number, in order that the sudden blaze after his coming out of the darkness of the staircase might confuse him the more.

‘That man must have the nerves of a North American Indian, he don’t wince or move a hair, by Jove! How d’you do, Hollebone?’ he added aloud. ‘Let me introduce Mrs Kasker-Ryves to you. My darling—why, what’s the matter?’

For Edith had fainted on the floor.

‘What luck,’ he chuckled to himself, but aloud,—

‘Good God! she’s fainted. She’s been tiring herself out with me, and she must have had a shock when I fainted myself this evening.

Would you be kind enough to lift her up and put her on the sofa, Mr Hollebhone?’

For Hollebhone was standing like a pillar of marble—and as white too. But at Mr Ryves's request he started, and coming forward, put his arms round her, and tried to gather strength to lift her—tried once, but his strength failed him—tried a second time, and still his will refused him its aid, but, bracing himself for a final effort, he raised her, this time without feeling a weight in his arms at all—and there his love hung in the air. Her face, tranquil and almost colourless, her eyes closed, and a great cloud of brown-golden hair that had escaped its bonds rippling tumultuously on to the ground, she lay there in his arms—his ideal, of which he had dreamed night after night and day after day, his lifelong it seemed. It was a deadly sin in him to gaze at her, and he closed his eyes, as he staggered with her to the sofa, for fear of contamination. As he laid her down she opened her eyes, with a happy smile, like that on the face of a dreaming child, and caught at his hand as he drew himself roughly away.

‘Edith, my love,’ said Mr Kasker-Ryves, who had approached noiselessly with a glass of water in his hands, ‘drink this, it will do you good—sit still now. Mr Hollebhone, there is the sal volatile on the table. Now a little eau-de-Cologne on her forehead. That's it, thank you. Now she'll do famously. Would you mind fanning her for a minute or two? I'm not strong enough to stand long.’

Acting on the words, he retired to his arm-chair and rang a handbell. Paton appeared.

‘Where is Mrs Kasker-Ryves’s maid?’ he asked.

And the man answered,—

‘She’s in next door, sir. You sent her in, if you remember, to see if she could be of any assistance to the doctor who is ill there.’

‘Thank you, Paton. Would you send in for her in about twenty minutes? Mrs Kasker-Ryves fainted a minute ago. She has been overworking herself with nursing me. She will be able to move in about twenty minutes, and Parker must be ready to put her to bed.’

The man retired, and at that moment Edith opened her eyes again, and was about to speak, when Mr Ryves stopped her.

‘Now, don’t speak, dearest,’ he said. ‘Keep quite quiet for a minute or two and you will be better. Now, Mr Hollebone, if you will favour me with your attention for a minute, I will tell you about my own case, and then will not detain you longer. I was attended until yesterday by your partner, Dr Hammond, but I suppose he has not been able to tell you anything about my state of health.’

Hollebone shook his head.

‘No,’ he said. ‘He was too ill, and I negligently omitted to look in the day book for his diagnosis. I will go and look at once.’

‘No, no,’ said Mr Kasker-Ryves, ‘don’t do that. I have Sir James Ditchett’s in the next room, and nothing of moment has

happened since to me except that I fainted this afternoon. But that was mere weakness, because—because I happened to get tired. I tried to walk home, and had sent the carriage on in advance. Wait a minute. I will go and fetch Sir James's diagnosis,' and he left the room before Hollebone could interpose.

Edith was sitting on the sofa, and he could not help looking at her—the strain would otherwise have made him faint—but the look of black hatred that she threw after her husband caused a shudder to pervade his being. It seemed to him so fearful that the woman he had loved could have flamed such resentment upon anyone.

She had been steeling her eyes to look at his face, as one steels one's eyes to look at the sun when it bursts from behind a heavy gold-rimmed cloud, and gazing at him hopelessly, as though anxious to note every change that the time had wrought in his face, and she saw nothing there but a faint shadow of loathing. Her face had been flushed with hope for the moment, but at the sight her eyes dilated and her face paled.

'Oh, Clem,' she said, with a queer catch in her voice, 'you don't—you don't hate me? You can't, you can't be so unjust. I—I did it for you.'

Her lips were quivering so she could not speak; but he could see it, and he hung his head, knowing how he had misjudged her, feeling the reproach, and casting about in his agony for a look to express his craving for

pardon, for to words he dare not trust himself. But she misunderstood his silence—perhaps wilfully or perhaps in fear that she had laid herself too much at his mercy—and a light came into her eyes, a proud, cold glitter, shot from under her eyelashes.

‘You—you are unjust,’ she said, but her face was a ghastly panic-stricken white. ‘You are not worthy of my love. Do you think it was *pleasant*, or that I have led a happy life since? I am only a year older than I was when I saw you last, but if I had foreseen such a year as this I have spent I would have used the present you made me. I should have gone to hell, but it would only have been a shifting of the fire from within my soul to without. You are mean, you are vile, but you were, and oh, you are still, all the world to me. Oh, Clem, you are more cruel to me even than *he* is.’

She spoke in a low voice and so fast that he hardly realised each sentence as she spoke it, as though he were translating from a foreign language, and a vague, wild idea filled his brain that her voice was the murmur of the voices of the damned heard from afar off. If she would only have cried, or seemed less utterly hopeless, he would have burst all bonds of conventional restraint in his endeavour to comfort her; but this low, rapid, almost silent torrent of speech overwhelmed him. He knew that the flood-gates of her long-pent soul were open, and that to attempt to make her cling to him to try to comfort her by words,

or to appease her longing by telling of his own yearning, would have given a less than transient relief. Nevertheless he trembled at her reproach, but most of all under her sad, true eyes.

‘I have sinned fearfully against my husband. I sinned in marrying him. I have sinned in yearning after you. I am sinning at this moment in speaking to you, and my life has been one long torment ever since my sins first began, but I have had one hope that has sustained me throughout it all, and that hope was that you would not have misjudged me, and now you tear that one little joy from my heart. It was all I had, and now that is gone. Only—only—’ The click of the handle of the door caused a new light that he could not understand dart across her eyes like lightning, and instinctively his eyes followed hers to the door, and thus it was that he could only half-understand her meaning in the words that followed. ‘Only, I have your present still.’

A terrible thought flashed across his brain. He had seized the wrong interpretation.

Mr Kasker-Ryves appeared, leaning on the arm of his servant.

‘I am very weak again,’ he said. ‘I had another seizure of some sort a minute ago. I hope it was no new development. What do you think on the subject, from what I have told you?’

‘I—oh, yes, I am afraid it is another development,’ said Hollebhone, like one awakening from a dream into a state of sudden

activity of mind, 'and it might prove very serious. If you will allow me I will go back and make you up an antidote—that is, a prescription; but I must not conceal from you the fact that there is a very grave danger.'

It was a long speech, but he needed to make it to recover himself sufficiently to trust to his legs. Mr Kasker-Ryves sank into his chair with a groan.

'You will do what you can to save me?' he said, with a ghastly face. 'I know I am past hope, but you will do what you can?' and the sweat stood out over his face in great beads that sparkled in the brilliant candle-light.

'I will do my best,' Hollebone said in all sincerity.

The old man eyed him keenly, and with a sigh of relief, having finished his inspection, sank back.

'Thank you,' he said, 'do what you can. I know I sha'n't live long anyhow,' and the two men knew that they understood each other. 'Paton,' the old man continued, 'go with my friend Dr Hollebone, and bring his prescription back with you.'

And Hollebone left the house, not daring to look at Edith again—he was afraid of her face. On the staircase the servant stopped him.

'Wait a minute, sir, please,' he said. 'Is there *no* hope for the master? Sir James Ditchett told me before we left town that it was simple madness on the master's part to come here, and that, even as it was, there was very little hope for him. But the master

would come, although Sir James as good as told him it was suicide.'

Hollebone hesitated a moment.

'I—I have not seen Sir James's diagnosis yet,' he said. 'When I have I will tell you what I think about the matter.'

The man thanked him, and they proceeded on in silence until they reached the house.

'Just come into this room a minute while I read Sir James's letter,' he said.

It was a strange list of diseases that Hollebone read, and in spite of his agitation of mind he could not help marvelling how one body could have borne them all.

'Good Heavens! what a life the man must have led, and yet most of them have only appeared during the last six months or so, according to Sir James. That means that they have been in his system and something has occurred to bring them out. Oh, well—' And, addressing himself to the servant, he said,—

'I am afraid there is very little hope for your master. He may die at any moment, even during the night. You are his body-servant, are you not?'

The man assented huskily.

'Well, look here, Mrs Kasker-Ryves must not be allowed to nurse him. She is far too—too indisposed herself. You must prepare all the food he eats yourself, that no impurities may get into it. Be very careful about that, and let his food be of the simplest—nothing

mixed. Milk or eggs. Do not let him touch anything else, as you value his life.'

The man burst into tears.

Hollebone looked at him in surprise.

'I can't help it, sir,' the man said. 'I don't think I ever shed a tear in my life before. But, somehow, to lose Mr Ryves, it seems like losing the whole world. I've been with him, boy and man, these twenty-five years, and in the whole of that time he's never done an unkind action or said a rough word to anyone.'

In fact Paton seemed quite broken down, and Hollebone said to him kindly,—

'Perhaps you had better go back to your master now, and I will send my prescription in by one of the servants. I may be some time before I make it up. Give it him immediately before eating anything, and for the rest, you may go on giving him the medicines Sir James and Dr Hammond have prescribed for him.'

The man said gratefully,—

'Thank you, sir,' and left the house.

Hollebone sat for a long time with his head bowed on the table. The suspicion was growing stronger within him. At last he raised his head.

'I don't see what else I can do, to-night at least. If I send him in the mixture, it *may* act as an antidote, and, on the other hand, there's not enough chlorodyne in it to act on his heart injuriously, and there's nothing else that could by any means have an ill effect. If I only get him safe out of this I'll never have anything to do with this

cursed pharmaceutical side again. Why, in God's name, did I ever meddle in medicine at all? That damned girl will be the end of me. How could I have been such a fool as to give her that poison? Even if she *does* it, I don't think I shall be able to let her be hung. But, of course, it is only a suspicion of mine. I must be going mad ever to entertain such an idea of little Edie. How is it possible? And yet it's best to be on the safe side. I'll send the antidote in and let him take it. What on earth have I done with the prescription? Oh, yes, it's in the drawer,' and he proceeded to make up the prescription.

It was, however, a matter that took some time, for his private dispensary was locked up at the bottom of the garden. Hither he took a lamp, and little Maud, perceiving the light, speedily joined him.

'Hullo, Maud,' he said as cheerfully as he could, 'come to look on? You must be quiet a minute or two until I've finished. Here are some black currant lozenges for you.'

Maud took the proffered lozenges, and proceeded to discuss them leisurely in silence. He finished mixing the ingredients, and having done so, he took up the lamp.

'Come along, Maud,' he said, 'I'm going into the house to label it. It's for the old gentleman next door—he's very, very ill.'

'As bad as papa?' she asked.

'Yes, yes, dear. Now, look here, run and give this to Mary Ann, and tell her to take it in next door.'

‘Mayn’t I take it in?’ asked the little girl eagerly.

‘Why, yes, dear, if you like,’ he answered; ‘it will save Mary Ann the trouble.’

‘He—he giv’d Gandon sixpence ve ovah day, an’ so pwaps he’ll give me one too. Me and Rose didn’t see him or he might have done.’

‘Avaricious little wretch!’ Hollebone said, with a smile. ‘Here you are—what do you say for it?’

‘Fank you,’ she answered.

‘No, you don’t. You’ve forgotten all I told you about your “th’s.” Gandon’s got over that by this time. You’re a baby. Now run in with the medicine, and give me half the sixpence when you get it.’

‘No, *tank* you,’ she answered and ran off.

Hollebone set about putting the room in order and reading up the day book for the morrow.

‘Same old round,’ he said to himself. ‘I’m tired to death of it before beginning. Oh Lord! I wish I’d had the courage to finish it at the hill to-day. The bother of the thing would have been over then. I’ve a good mind when poor old Hammond dies to leave all my money to the children, and borrow just enough of my poison to finish myself with. I daresay Edie would lend it me—it would tickle her vanity to begin with. I gave her nearly an ounce, and half a grain would finish anyone. It wasn’t a bad present to give a girl—like her,

at least. If she finishes off old Ryves with it it will stand her in about three millions of hard cash. And of course if she does it I'm morally responsible. I wish to God I had never seen her. This last development is really too much. For, even if she does murder him, I *can't* let her be hung for it. Not that I care for her the least in the world—not the least shadow; but still, I gave her the poison—and it's opportunity makes the thief, they say, and so I ought in right to hang for it. By Jove! it wouldn't be a bad idea to go out of the world that way. I might just as well confess I'd poisoned him, and then be hung for it. I would do it too, only they might say I was mad, and only shut me up for it. Besides, I don't think I could stand being in the dock on a murder charge, the strain would be too much for my nerves—not but what they're strong enough too. I wonder how many other fellows would have borne having Edith in their arms as I did this evening and not kissed her, in spite of her husband and conventional morality. However, I must get on with this cursed day book. Hullo! here's Mrs Waters got something wrong with her—pulmonary phtthisis. H'm, that means a through bill for her. Poor old lady, she must be near eighty by this time. She's had a bad time of it too—four sons drowned at sea, and her husband too. Poor old Dr Hammond's wife was the only one of her family that died in her bed, and she was the youngest—and the eldest daughter went to the devil, and died God knows where

and how, but she's bound to be dead by this time. They can't stand *that* life long—consumption, and God knows what then. Wonder what sort of a fellow the father was to have turned her out of doors—must have been a bit of a brute. *He's* gone to Davy Jones's locker, rest his soul. And Mrs Waters outlives the lot of them, poor old creature. What a life! I wouldn't like to live to eighty myself, more especially if it's to be eighty such years as this has been with me; but that isn't likely, because I don't care for her any more—not two pins.' He heaved a deep sigh, not so much from sorrow as to clear his lungs, and said aloud, 'Heigho! *Sic Vita!*'

'Hope you don't mean you're sick of your life already, Hollebone?' came a voice from the doorway. 'Excuse my intruding. I would have knocked at the door if it hadn't been open.'

'Oh, is that you, Jenkins? Come in. I didn't hear you.'

'No, you seemed to be in a brown study. I've been upstairs and seen poor old Hammond. *I* can't do anything for him. I don't know whether you can. If you can, I'll gladly hand him over to you again. It's a long way out of my track to come out here.'

'Well, you won't have to do it very long. He's sure to go during the night.'

'No, d'you think so? I gave him a week at least.'

Hollebone shook his head.

'I should like you just to look over some

time to-morrow as you've begun the case. He might last a week if he gets over the next fifteen hours, but he won't do that, I'm afraid.'

'I s'pose you're right,' the rival practitioner answered. He was a young man, but in spite of that he had a great veneration for Hollebone's knowledge and capabilities. 'How is the old man next door?' he said suddenly, after a moment's pause. 'I never knew such complications as he's got in various parts. He's about ten times less chance of life than Dr Hammond, and yet he lives. Some men have all the luck in this life.'

'I'm afraid his luck's come to an end by now,' Hollebone said gravely.

'About time too,' the other answered. 'But is he as bad as that?'

Hollebone nodded.

'You see he must have been living the life of an over-fed rhinoceros for eighty years or so, and in these last six months about a score of mortal diseases have showed up, and it's just a race which of them coils him up.'

'That's something like a life,' the other said enthusiastically, 'to live like a pig in clover up to six months of one's death and then crumble up fast. How long d'you give *him*?'

Hollebone laughed.

'Forty-eight hours is about half a hundred more than is possible, and so I s'pose he might take that. He's about half a hundred times more lucky than anyone else.'

'You're very liberal to him. Everyone in

the town here thinks he must be dead now. Didn't he have a fit or something this afternoon?'

'It wasn't a fit. Only a momentary failure of the heart's action. *That* ought to have polished him off.'

'Well, well. I must be trotting. Then I will look in to-morrow morning early to see how poor Hammond is. I tell you what it is, Hollebone, I wouldn't mind changing with him, though he *has* only got two days to live. From what one hears, he's booked through to the good place—and then to have such a wife as he's got a fellow would be lucky to have her for two hours, let alone days, and she's killing herself over that old beggar.'

Hollebone smiled a somewhat sickly smile.

'Appearances are deceptive,' he said.

'Anyhow, I wouldn't mind being him,' the other replied as he took his leave.

'Nor I either,' said Hollebone, thinking of his poison, and he went upstairs to Dr Hammond's room.

Dr Hammond's attitude had not changed since Hollebone saw him last, and Mary Ann was knitting beside the fire.

'Look here, Mary Ann,' he said, 'you must go to bed to-night. You didn't last night.'

'Then I'm not a-goin', Doctor Hollebone,' she said defiantly.

But Hollebone said,—

'Hush, now. Be quiet. I insist upon it.

I'm just going upstairs to unpack, and make myself comfortable for the night, and when I come down again you go out of the room, whether you like it or not, and if you're a sensible girl you'll go to bed. You won't be of the least use to me, and you're half asleep as it is now,' and Mary Ann recognised the uselessness of proceeding any further in her defiance.

Accordingly, Hollebone retired to his room, and began to make himself as comfortable as possible to pass the night in the sickroom. He was still in his shirt sleeves, putting away in the drawers some of his clothes, from a portmanteau he had opened, when a knock came to the door.

'Who's there?' he said somewhat angrily. 'Come in.'

'It's on'y me — Maud,' a plaintive voice said. 'Vere wasn't anyone to talk to downstairs, 'cos Emma is puttin' Rose to bed, and ve kitchen clock ticked so loud I was frightened, an' so I camed to talk to you; but I'll go away if you're angry.'

'Oh, no, I'm not, Maud dear,' he said. 'I didn't know it was you. You can come in if you like to, and sit down while I'm putting my things away.'

'But I don't want to sit down *alö-an*,' she said reproachfully. 'It isn't laïke sittin' down properly.'

'Isn't it?' he said, taking pity on her loneliness. 'Well, wait a minute, until I've put my things away. Now then.'

And he seated himself in an arm-chair by the fire, that had been lit especially to air the room against his return. Little Maud was, with considerable expenditure of force, dragging a chair to the opposite side of the fireplace, when he stopped her.

'You can sit on my knee if you like Pussy,' he said, and she accepted his offer eagerly.

'Oo!' she said, with a little purr, 'vis is what I larke. You didn't shave yourself vis mornin', an' your chin is *all* bristles like a chestnut outside. I do-an't maïnd, you know,' she added reassuringly, 'but I didn't ibspect it, and it spraped my cheek.'

'You didn't ibspect, didn't you?' he said, rubbing his cheek against hers, with a pleasant feeling of companionship stealing over him. 'Where's that half of the sixpence that I was to have?'

'He didn't give me no sixpences,' she said disappointedly.

'Didn't he? What a shame! What did he say?'

'He only said, "Good God! it's her sister," and he turned first red, and ven whaïte, like a sweet vat you suck ve paint off of.'

'Who was who's sister?' Hollebhone asked, never having heard of any sister of Edith's.

'Me,' Maud answered enigmatically.

'Tell me all about it,' said he, feeling hopelessly muddled.

'I don't know nuffing,' she said, 'ibsept vat

he was lookin' into ve faire when I went into ve woom, just like you do when you've got ve dumps—and he didn't hear me come in, an' so ve gentleman what opened ve doah said, "If you please, sir, here's ve little girl 'at's brought ve medsin, an' she wants to give it you herself," 'cos I wouldn't let him take it up. Well, an' then the old gentleman looked round, just as if he didn't know me at first, and ven his face got all wed, an' he was sittin' in an arm-chair, an' his hands catched hold of ve arms quite taight, and his head part came out in front, an' his underneath part went back into ve cha'rah, an' ven he said, "Good God! it's her sister," an' I said, "No, I'm Rose's sister," an' ven he said, "Are you a devil sent by Fate? If not, for God's sake don't mention that name again," an' his voice was *so* funny, squeaky—just as if only half of it came out—an' I was so fraightened vat I couldn't answer, an' *ven* he said, "Damn it, Paton, go away, and don't stand grinning at me. Don't you see I want to be alone?" an' I don't fink Paton was *grinning*, 'cos he was almost cryin' when we got outside ve doah, an' I was fraightened, so I went away too. But I'm not a devil sent by Fate—am I?—'cos a devil's got horns an' a tail; vat's what Mary Ann says.'

'No, you're not; you're a very nice little girl. Now just you say your poetry for me.'

'Oh, I've learnt some new poetry while you were away. Shall I say vat?'

‘Yes, say the new, by all means,’ said Hollebone abstractedly, and she began :

‘Fire, fire,’ said the crier,
‘Where, where?’ said Mrs Blair?
‘Upstairs,’ says Mrs Mears.
‘Are you sartin?’ says Mrs Martin.

‘Gandy says it ought to be, “Are you certain?” says Mrs Merton,” but that isn’t right, is it?’

‘Eh, what? No, not at all. Go on, it’s very pretty.’

‘But that’s all,’ she said.

‘Well, say something else. Say “The stars were falling fast.”’

‘But it isn’t the *stars*, it’s the dew.’

‘Oh, never mind, fire away.’

And the child started off in her singsong voice, leaving him time to think and rack his brains to find out who ‘her sister’ could possibly be, or why the name ‘Rose’ could affect Mr Ryves so powerfully. But he could make nothing out of his thoughts, only, as Maud said at the close of the sitting,—

‘You haven’t been *half* naïce to-night. You haven’t been finking about me at all. I made a *lot* of mistakes in “Dwink, pwetty cweature,” on purpose an’ you didn’t take any notice.’

‘Didn’t I, Pussy? Never mind. Go, and let Mary Ann put you to bed.’

‘Cawwy me downstairs,’ she said, and he obeyed her, after which he returned to spend the night in the sickroom, and a dreary long night it proved, with no sound to break the silence but the stentorian breathing of the old

doctor and the sound of the waves, which the wind, itself occasionally rising to a shriek, bore down to his ears, and with nothing to occupy either mind or body save occasionally to moisten the lips of the unconscious dying man.

And thus through the night his thoughts took up his time, and shook his whole frame with a mad desire to do something—anything to stave off those terrible thoughts. Towards six a little light seemed filtering in over the shutter, and in the wish for a moment of action he threw open the window and watched the sun come over the sea—a hemisphere of gold on a sea of motionless lead—and he was just noting how the yellow was letting its tints swim almost imperceptibly over the east when a cessation of sound in the room behind caught his ear.

‘Yesterday was the end of a year for me,’ he said aloud, ‘and to-day is the beginning of eternity for poor Dr Hammond. When will my turn come for a change in life?’

The sun had risen fully—above the gold-dappled blue of the sea’s restless swinging it hung, round and glowing, in a cloudless sky. A new day had begun, but Hollebone drew down the blind and shut out its joyous light. The sparkle of the sun on the hoar-frosted land below consorted ill with the gloom on his soul. Whether it consorts well or ill with the presence of death, who can say?

Be that as it may, he drew down the blind to shut out the light, but the day had dawned, and grew brighter in spite of it.



CHAPTER X.

A quiet resting from all jealousy.—*Old Play.*



AS Maud had said, Mr Ryves turned first red and then white. Perhaps it was as well for her peace of mind that she did not see the look that came into his face after the door had closed behind her. There might have been another night's rest ruined. Children have strange fancies, it may be not stranger ones than other people have, but they are less chary of imparting them. Mr Ryves was hard pressed by a fancy that night. Paton was of opinion that he had gone mad, for, on making some excuse to go into the room, he saw his master sitting in a chair, with an expression of horror on his face such that Paton had never dreamt of as possible. Paton had been brought up in excessively polite circles, and at ordinary times would have said that an expression of horror on anyone's face was terribly bad form; but there was something about his master's face that precluded all thought of form, bad or otherwise. It made Paton shudder, and it takes a good

deal to make a well-bred upper-servant shudder—and Paton had been known not to wince when he had observed an absent-minded guest at his master's table make use of a steel knife with his fish, which demonstrates clearly that his nerves were excellent. But this was something else, and Paton felt for a moment that ice-water was trickling down his spinal column.

That was what he felt at viewing Mr Kasker-Ryves's face from the side, as he gazed at the fire. But when his master suddenly turned it towards him his knees shook and his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, for there was a passion, heatless and white, in the face that held the venomous spirit of a million oaths in its oval casket of flesh.

'Paton,' said a voice—a voice Paton had never heard before—'Paton, why can you not leave me in peace?'

'Oh, sir,' said Paton, 'how could I leave you in such a state?'

'What do you mean?' the voice said, and a pair of eyes, that had for the moment been wandering vaguely, turned suddenly on him with a glare like that in the eyes of a dying eagle. 'What do you mean? Don't you see the death in my face? You would let a dog die in peace, would you not?'

Paton realised that his master was speaking to him, for the first and last time, as one man speaks to another, and knew that he should leave his master alone with the past; but his limbs seemed to refuse their functions, and he

remained, trembling. Again the glare came into the cold eyes, which glanced from him to the door, and Paton, feeling that his master was treating him now as a dog, slunk out of the room, and closed the door behind him. Outside, he paused, and putting his finger between his teeth, bit it almost to the bone, in the hope that the pain would drive out of his remembrance the look of death in his master's face.

A slight grating noise came from the lock of the door behind him, and he shuddered once again.

'Good Lord!' he said, 'there was no need to lock the door. I wouldn't go into *that* room again—no, not for a king's ransom.'

Mr Kasker-Ryves had returned to his seat, and remained gazing at the fire. There was a cold feeling round his heart, and by it he knew that his soul was shivering before the relentless approach of the Almighty; and the shivering of his soul made itself manifest in a shuddering that had taken hold of his body.

The hours flew by, or did they crawl? He could hardly tell whether each minute had a thousand feet, or whether the hours had pinions that outsped the wind. He did not know even whether he would rather they should pass fast or slowly.

True, every minute that died away left him nearer to his death; but then he felt that death itself would be preferable to the agony of dread that he then suffered, and superadded

to the agony of mind was the physical pain of his body's decay; but, more than all things else, the thought that he had hastened his death by his own mad hatred of his wife made him feel a frantic grief.

'If I had not been foolhardy enough to come down here I might have stood some chance of recovering,' he said, bitterly repentant of his folly; 'but here, the very sight of this place is enough to kill me. Why should it have been this place of the whole world? And then the sight of that child nearly killed me. For the moment I really thought it must have been a ghost, it was so exactly like *her* little sister—and then the name she mentioned. It must be one of her sister's children, and if so I should like to leave them a little money to keep them from want. I can't leave it in my will—at least it would want witnessing—but Jemmy would see to it if I merely express the wish in a codicil, without witnesses. Yes, I will do it.'

And he arose from his seat and went into his wife's bedroom to fetch the will, which was in his dressing-case, carefully locked up. The door opened direct from his room into hers, and thus he had not very far to go; but even the slight movement made his brain swim so that he could hardly stand. He trod very softly, after his wont, and opened the door noiselessly.

Edith was kneeling on the floor, with her face hidden in her hands, and by her side lay the violin, smashed to fragments.

Mr Kasker-Ryves smiled to himself.

'She seems to have only just found it out. How she must be suffering now, and it's only a matter of time which of us dies first. I wonder if she has heard me come in?'

He stood for a moment watching her complacently, and revelling in the thought that, old though he was, he still had the power to torture somebody; but even as he was at the height of his joy a flamelike pain darted across his chest from side to side, stopping his breath for the time, and leaving him panting and trembling before this new proof that his time was drawing in.

Once again the shuddering pervaded his being. A terrible dread had seized on him, a horror of going out of the world hated by one who had striven so long and earnestly to do right towards himself, and who might have loved him and cherished him tenderly but for his own cruelty.

'What have you done with my poison?' she said fiercely, noticing his presence in the room. 'Where is it? Give it me. Let me kill myself. Oh, my dear poison that I treasured so,' and once more she covered her face with her hands and burst into hysterical sobs.

The question made him tremble the more. He saw now how hard he had pressed her, and that he had driven her to wish to take her own life, even as he had done to her who had loved him long ago—and even as he had loved the one without knowing it, so he recog-

nised that he now loved the other. But there she sat sobbing at his feet.

‘Edith,’ he said very softly, but she sobbed on in silence. ‘Edith,’ he repeated in an agony of desire for love. ‘Edith, *please* look up,’ and she uncovered her glorious face, wet with tears, and he knew that she hated him—now, after he had striven so long for it—now, when all he had to live for was to remove that hatred, for when one has but a few short hours to live things show themselves with all too startling clearness in their true light.

‘Sir,’ she said, epitomising her feelings in the hopeless tone of her voice, ‘sir, you are my husband—and I obey you.’

‘Oh, but, Edith,’ he said, trembling so that his lips hardly framed the words he would have them say, ‘do you not—*can* you not love me too?’

‘My God,’ she said, with a great desolate powerlessness, ‘how *can* I love a man who could do that?’ and she pointed to the broken Stradivarius.

‘Oh, Edith,’ he said, reckless of truth now that he wished to regain her love. ‘Edith—and it was out of my love for you that I broke it, in the mere madness of jealousy at the thought that you should love another.’

Perhaps it was that her vanity was soothed, it having been grievously wounded by her lover; perhaps it was the sight of her husband’s anguish, or the ever-predominant thought that she had wronged him and deserved any punishment, made her tone a

little softer when she spoke again, after a pause.

‘But it was so cruel of you to bring me down here to taunt me with my marriage vows at the sight of my—of him who used to love me.’

And without hesitation he spoke, adopting an expression of surprise.

‘To taunt you with your marriage vows!’ he said. ‘Oh, Edith, how *could* you think me capable of such baseness. I brought you down here in repentance at my jealousy, that you might be comforted by the sight of him, and I even let him put his arms round you, and left you alone with him—do you think that was *pleasant* to me? What other motive could I possibly have? You have misjudged me—indeed and indeed you have.’

Edith turned white for a moment.

‘I thought—I thought—’ she faltered, and burst into tears, and still kneeling, she caught at his hand and kissed it passionately. ‘Oh, my husband, my husband,’ she sobbed, ‘forgive me. I have wronged you so deeply, and so much, and I can never atone for it; but oh, I have suffered a great deal, and I am very wretched,’ and she pressed his hand to her forehead, and would not let him draw it away though he tried.

He stood and racked his poor failing brains for an answer to her craving for forgiveness. He would fain have had her rise from her knees, because it seemed to him now that he should be the one to kneel to her,

and for very want of words he held his peace, and she went on, turning up her tear-wet face yearningly to him,—

‘Oh, my husband,’ she said, ‘forgive me, forgive me. I have wronged you very, very deeply, but you are great and noble enough to pardon even that. Oh, say you will forgive.’

‘My dearest,’ he said, ‘what *have* I to forgive? You have been the truest of wives to me, and I—I have hurt your feelings at times. If there is anyone to be forgiven, it is I.’

But she cut him short, wringing her hands.

‘Oh, no, no, no. It is I. You have been the noblest and best of husbands, and I have sinned against Heaven, and against the name of wife. For oh, I could not help loving *him*. I sinned very, very heavily in marrying you. It was betraying you, for I did not love you then. I wanted to get your money. It was terrible, mean, contemptible, vile, there is no other word for it, and even *he* despises me for it, and I—I love him still. And is not that a sin in me? And I was even base enough to hate *you* at times, even a moment ago. I thought—oh, believe me, I did think that you were treating me cruelly and hardly in bringing me down here. I was even wicked enough to believe that you had done it to tempt me and torment me, and you are so good and noble, and have been so very kind to me, and I—I am too base to exist. Oh, forgive me, forgive me, if you can, such grievous sins

—do, do, for the love of Christ,' and she held her head averted downwards for shame before his gaze, and thought of Magdalen and the Redeemer, and he bent over her and put his arms round her.

'Oh, Edith, Edith, my dearest, truest wife, I cannot, I dare not tell you how I have wronged you, for fear you should hate me, and I am yearning for your love—a very little love. Oh, say that you can pardon me.'

But she held her face downwards and sobbed.

'I have nothing to forgive. You are too noble for me to dare to love. But—but I do love you, as one should love a God, and—I would like you to kiss me, to show that you forgive me before I die. It would make me die a little happier. . . .'

'Please kiss me, to let me know that you forgive me,' and she held up her face to him.

For a moment he hesitated, fearing lest the touch of his lips should contaminate her, and then bending over her, he kissed her reverently, as one would kiss a sacred relic. And she let her head fall forward with a feeling of awe, and of her own great unworthiness before this godlike man.

He felt his brain was failing, and turning on his heel, left the room, after having hastily seized the dressing-case he had come in search of; but in spite of the agitation of his mind he forced himself to sit down and write the codicil to his will. It was a singular trait in his

character that he was too nervous to trust his will in the hands of his solicitors, but invariably carried it about with him, in order that he might at any moment add a codicil.

In reinserting the will into its place he noticed the poison that he had taken from Edith, and which he had, for greater safety, hidden in the case.

‘What a good thing it was that I took the precaution to abstract that poison from her keeping, poor girl,’ he said. ‘I am glad that that crime is spared to me. I wouldn’t like to have two lives on my conscience, and yet I suppose I have ruined a great many people’s lives—a great many—it’s a horrible thought. But it’s all over—it’s too late to do anything now. Oh, how ill I feel, and my throat is parched.’

He moved his chair round, and sat looking at the fire, which was burning very low, and already ashes showed themselves in dun-coloured flakes over the red glow, like clouds that fleck the surface of a fiery sunset.

He sat there and gazed at it, and tried to form images out of it, but his brain refused the task. Only dead and gone memories from the time when he was a hot-blooded youth, from the time when he was a lusty man, from the time when his hair had begun to grizzle, until now, when he was an old white-headed, white-bearded man—the memories from all the periods of his lifetime flitted in front of his appalled eyes, and made him shudder and wince, so terribly cold-hearted and wicked did

they seem under the strong light of his life's sunset. At the time they had seemed mere slight self-indulgences, nothings, trifles that he had committed, as he would have smoked a cigarette, knowing it to be bad for his health. But now it was terrible to look down that long skeleton-lined vista of years, and he quaked and trembled at the doom that would be in store for him if—but that remained unformulated.

He stared at the fire in the hope of seeing one face come out of the red glow—a face that had shown love for him, a face that he had loved, and that he craved to see once more.

His throat was very parched, and he reached out his hand for a glass of milk that stood on the table close by—but all the while he kept his eyes fixed on the dying glow of the coals, in the dread that if he averted them once the face might come into being and disappear before he could see it. His fingers closed round the glass, and he was about to convey it to his mouth, but before he was able to accomplish this end a concentration of the anticipation that *her* face was about to appear in the fire made the hand pause half-way. The anticipation grew to a certainty, and his whole frame trembled for joy, and his eyes swam so from the straining that he could hardly see.

'She is coming,' he said half hysterically, and the blood poured in great jets through his veins. 'Look—ah!'

But suddenly the fire shifted.

The multitude of candles he had lit to confuse Hollebone by their glare began to burn low in their sockets—one had even burnt down to the paper that had been folded round it. That ignited with a great glare, torchwise, pouring up volumes of greasy black smoke. Then it went out, and another began—and another and another. The room grew darker and darker, until the dawn began to show itself in silver cracks through the grey cloud-wall, like fur on the edging of a lady's cloak. The cloud itself sailed up from the horizon, and passed majestically from the sea overhead. From north to south the sky grew yellow, and the sea, kissed by the soft wind, smiled and dimpled its surface into diamonds of gold and blue, mocking the tints of Heaven. The thin crescent of the jealous moon hung in the sky, more and more silver in the rose of the dawn, until at last it faded away. Then the sun peered over the edge of the sea.

What is't to die ?
'Tis less than to be born ; a lasting sleep ;
A quiet resting from all jealousy ;
A thing we all pursue—I know besides
It is but giving over of a game
That must be lost.





CHAPTER XI.

When one has rolled the Ethical snowball of his Ego a year forward he has gathered a good deal on the way.

Goethe to Frau von Laroche.

January 3, 1775.



HOUSE into which death has entered has always a calm dimness over it, not dissimilar to the noonday hush of a cloister—a feeling of fingers placed reverently to lips—and it was from this sanctuary of hushedness that Hollebone must needs sally forth on his rounds. Starting early in the morning, before breakfast indeed, it was his habit to visit the poorer patients, who were not likely to be discommoded by the untimely season of his visitation.

The morning was one of those bright cloudless days that come like the ghost of the summer to cheer the year before it finally plunges into its winter sleep at the fore end of November. But the cheeriness of the day found no reflection in his soul. He was gloomy, with the determined pessimism of an injured man, and, moreover, it annoyed him to be the bearer of fatal tidings—those of the death of Dr Hammond—and yet at every household he

visited the inevitable string of questions was propounded.

Last of all, in the course of his early round, he found death awaiting him at the house of Mrs Waters, his partner's deceased wife's mother, for that aged dame had passed away just before he arrived at the door.

A doctor, by usage, becomes acquainted with the blacker side of human vicissitudes, and speedily grows case-hardened, but this second death in the day, so early, seemed to him to have some sinister foreboding.

'Deaths never come by pairs,' he said to himself, 'always in triplets. Who is to be the third? I wish to God it was myself.'

From Mrs Waters's house to his own was but a step, and he was returning thither to get some food, and to give some orders to Mary Ann, when Paton came in suddenly, with a white, scared face.

'I came in, sir,' he said, 'to ask you what it would be best to do. I didn't wish to alarm Mrs Kasker-Ryves, perhaps needlessly, but—'

'Good God, man, what's the matter? Is your master worse?' Hollebhone asked.

'That is just what I cannot say, sir,' the man said. 'His room door is locked. I have knocked and knocked, but he has given no answer, and I thought it better to come in and ask you what to do than to alarm Mrs Kasker-Ryves.'

'You were quite right,' Hollebhone said hurriedly. 'You say you cannot make him

answer your knocking. Which way does his room face? Over the sea—to the back, doesn't it?'

The man answered,—

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, look here, just go into my garden—there's a ladder lying against the wall. I will go round next door—you can hand it over to me, and I can climb up to his window and get in that way. Hurry, now! The servant will show you the way.'

The man did as he was told, and with all possible speed Hollebhone was at the dead man's window, which, without a moment's hesitation, he broke, and then entered the room.

The atmosphere, however, was so fetid as almost to make him faint, caused by the suffocating exhalations of the candles.

A single glance at the motionless figure that had collapsed into the chair before the fire showed him what had happened.

He recoiled against the window sill, not daring to look more closely for fear of confirming his horrible suspicion, and before he could think of doing anything the servant, who had followed him up the ladder, entered through the broken window.

'Is it all over?' the man asked.

And Hollebhone answered mechanically,—

'Yes,' and he shut his eyes from giddiness.

The man went up to the body.

'Yes, sir,' he said huskily. 'Poor master! He has died—and it's apoplexy, too. I know

the symptoms. Isn't it so, doctor? He must have died very suddenly.'

Hollebone said faintly,—

'Yes—very suddenly.'

The suspicion was growing stronger.

'It is very strange,' the man went on. 'He must have just been taking a glass of milk. Mrs Kasker-Ryves poured it out for him just after you left. It will be a little comfort to her to know that she was of service to him even at the last moment.'

The man tried to remove the glass from the dead man's rigid grasp, and as he was so engaged, did not notice Hollebone's ghastly pallor.

'That proves it,' he said to himself. 'She put the poison into his milk. Good God! What shall I do? What shall I do?'

And he kept his eyes turned from the body, dreading to see the terrible work that *his* poison had effected.

The noise of the breaking window had aroused the household, and Edith appeared at the door in between the two rooms haggard and white. As she came in Paton, in simple respect, undid the other door and went out, closing it behind him.

Edith, but half awakened from a terrible dream, looked at Hollebone with dilated, horror-stricken eyes.

'Oh, Clement,' she said, 'what does it mean?'

Hollebone's power of speech seemed to fail him for the moment, but steeling himself, he said as harshly as he could,—

‘Your husband is dead,’ and pointed to the body.

With a sudden light of revelation welling into her wondering eyes, she flung her arms round the neck of the motionless corpse and fell to the ground with it.

Hollebone turned his head towards the window. Somehow the look on her face had shaken his certainty.

‘Good Heavens!’ he said, ‘what am I to do? If I say that he died of poison she will be hung. There can be no doubt of that—and yet, and yet. My God! I love her in spite of it all. I have made her do it. It was because she loved me. I *can’t* let her be hung.’

And he remained in paralysed amazement surveying the living and the dead, lying together on the floor. In his strained state of mind he had hard work to keep from laughing at the grotesque figure of the corpse as it lay, stiff and unnatural like an artist’s lay figure, across Edith; but a sudden sense of the incongruous horror of it came into his mind, and, running forward, he lifted the heavy body up as well as he could and called aloud for Paton. The man entered, and Hollebone said hurriedly,—

‘Send Mrs Kasker-Ryves’s maid here. Your mistress has fainted again, and get someone of the servants to help you lift Mr Kasker-Ryves’s body on to the bed. Be quick, now.’

But there was little need for the latter in-

junction. The servants had been waiting, half curiously, half in awe, on the landing outside the door, and they entered and did as they were bid silently, at least it seemed so to Hollebone, although their lips were moving and a buzz of voices was on the air.

Edith was carried out of the room, and at last he himself left it. He was still, as it were, in a dream. There was such a horror in and about everything that it seemed to him as if such terrible occurrences must be the usual happenings in this world, and that the life he had hitherto led had been a meretricious apparition of which he had not apprehended the true horror. He went about his everyday work callously, but the light and shade had gone from his existence, and with it the power of distinguishing between good and evil. It is true that he had some small scruples about falsifying Mr Ryves's death certificate, but the pangs of conscience were so small as in no wise to interfere with his after-thoughts. An impenetrable atmosphere of cynicism had settled down over his mind, a sense of the worthlessness of human ends, so overpowering that at times he was startled at the fact that anyone in this world struggled or was eager after anything.

Edith was very ill with brain fever, and her mother and Julia came down to nurse her, and shortly afterwards Mr Ryves the younger came also, to ascertain how his stepmother was at first hand. They were an uneasy quartette watching round Edith's bed. Perhaps the

unconscious patient was the easiest of them all in her mind.

Before Hollebone Mrs Ryland positively quailed. He seemed to her to be slighting her so obviously that she was afraid all the world noticed it, and having no one else to appeal to, she attempted to take refuge in Julia, excusing her own part in Edith's marriage and in everything. To tell the truth, Mrs Ryland felt herself a much injured person—and the more so that in the depths of her heart lurked a guilty conscience. Her husband had several times since their daughter's marriage expressed misgivings on the subject, and on hearing of her illness he had burst into such an agonised torrent of self-reproach that she had felt herself somewhat implicated in the crime.

'I'm sure it was much better that she should have married this Mr Ryves,' she said to herself for the thousandth time, just after Julia had repulsed her advances. 'If she loves this young man she can marry him now, and there's no harm done to anyone in particular.'

Nevertheless Mrs Ryland felt that somewhere about her mind there was a tender spot that she would just as well not approach. Therefore she kept as much out of Hollebone's way during his professional visits as she could, and Hollebone at other times never approached the house; and as to young Mr Ryves, he was even more strange in his conduct than Hollebone. She felt quite sure

he had something on his mind, he was so very abstracted, and Mrs Ryland was, moreover, certain that his absentness had some connection with that Tubbs girl. As for Julia herself, words would be powerless to express Mrs Ryland's indignation at her conduct. To be sure she gave the young man no encouragement whatever, and she had thrown up every engagement in London to come down and nurse Edith, and she did nurse her unremittingly and assiduously; moreover, Julia was so much in the sickroom that she hardly ever saw young Kasker-Ryves—but that was all a trick to make him the more eager.

'It's all very well,' Mrs Ryland said to her maid, whom out of sheer loneliness she had taken into her confidence, 'it's all very well for her to say she came down here while Mr Ryves had gone back to Yorkshire to bury his poor father, who is now in Heaven, if ever a man was—it's all very well for her to say that, but she knew that he would be certain to come down here to inquire after his step-mother's health, and that's why she came.'

'To be sure, mum,' the servant said demurely. 'It isn't likely she came down here to nurse Miss Edith—I mean Mrs Ryves. It isn't likely, either, that her crying is genuine; she must have an onion in her handkerchief, tho' to be sure I've never noticed the smell of it, and it's so easy to make a face like hers look pale and ill by darkening the rims of her eyes artificially; and then, as you say, she

shuts herself up in the sickroom *all* day long and never goes out alone, just in order to make young Mr Ryves more eager.'

There was something about the sound of this speech that made Mrs Ryland feel just in the least degree uneasy as to its true import, and she changed the subject, after a pause.

'Ah!' she said, with a sigh of reminiscence, 'what a good man Mr Kasker-Ryves was. I'm sure if my daughter could have been happy with anyone she should have been with him, but she was so conscientious, she has nearly nursed herself into the grave with him. What a fine sight his funeral must have been. All the gentry of the county were there, and the grave was filled to the top with the wreaths that had been sent from all parts of the country. And what a magnificent sermon the bishop gave over his grave. It made me cry to read it.'

And, indeed, the reading of Mr Ryves's obituary sermon made an inordinate number of people weep, over and above the class whose business in life is to weep at fashionable sermons. Many people wept, too, at Mr Ryves's death, for the recipients of his bounty were legion. Even his rival merchants could find little against him after his death, little to weigh against the true merit of the man in the aggregate.

In the meantime his son was abstracted in a marked degree. He spoke to no one, and hardly ever stirred out of his room except at meal times, when they all three dined together

in almost solemn silence, which, when it was broken, owed its rupture entirely to meteorological circumstances, and damp ones at that. For the winter was setting in with fog and rain. A month passed by, a terribly dismal month for everyone ; but Edith began to grow better, became conscious, and then—a few things happened. First of all, Mrs Ryland fell ill, half of rheumatism and half of hysteria, with a constant running over at the eyes, until everyone voted her a nuisance, in the depressing state of the weather, and Julia was positively glad when she took to her bed. To be sure she had to dine alone with young Kasker-Ryves, but she placed implicit faith in her coldness of front in repelling that frivolous young swell, as she forced herself to call him. But she put overdue coldness into her demeanour, and the reaction when she was alone was noticeable even to Edith. Edith was by this time gaining strength rapidly, and was beginning to notice things ; and one day—it was after she had got sufficiently advanced in health to sit by the fire, in an arm-chair—she observed Julia in a brown study, which was unprecedented in her experience, and she said, with a little smile,—

‘ Why, Ju, how quiet you are. I believe you must have been crossed in love.’

To her surprise, instead of turning off her remark with a jest, Julia flushed angrily and kept silence, a sign, as Edith well knew, that she was repressing a tumult of wrath. Moreover, for the rest of the afternoon Julia was

excessively bad-tempered and gloomy, hardly saying a word. This turned Edith's thoughts inwards, and weak as she was she had little trouble in making up her mind to a desperate step. When Edith had once evolved a resolution upon any subject there was no hesitation left in her mind as to its advisability—a characteristic she had inherited from her father. As chance would have it, Julia left the room in search of a pair of scissors that had got lost, after the peculiar habit of scissors, and once having gone, she seemed to be in no hurry to return. During her absence Hollebone entered on his professional visit, and thus for the first time they were alone together. He had expected to find Julia or someone in the room with her, and in a listless way would have preferred it. He had by this time reconciled himself to the fact that he still loved her, in spite of everything that had passed; but although he perforce admitted *that*, perhaps more from habit than for any other reason, he had no particular desire to be near her, or even to see her. Having become an unwitting disciple of Berlioz's system of philosophy, the system of 'Absolute Indifferentism in Universal Matter,' he had no wish to enter another phase of philosophic psychology, to have his 'Indifferentism' overcome by a passion. Moreover, he felt uneasy in his mind when in the presence of Edith, even when she was lying unconscious on her bed—she and his 'System' seemed so incongruous. Therefore he felt awkward at entering a room

in which she was alone. She had been brooding over the fire, and her face was slightly scorched by the heat.

'Oh, it is you,' she said softly, with a happy smile.

Hollebone, in desperation, adopted his *most* professional manner.

'Yes,' he said. 'I have looked in to see how you were. You are getting along famously. I sha'n't be of any use soon.'

She said,—

'Oh, Clem,' with an unhappy little sigh, just to steel herself, and then, 'sit down—please do—I want to speak to you.' At which her fortitude deserted her, and she began to weep softly.

He sat looking at her without so much as feeling awkward. The shock he had sustained, and was still labouring under, had driven out all sense of pity, for anyone or anything, from his mind.

'Oh, Clem,' she said suddenly, 'you are very cruel—or no, it's not that, only I am very miserable. But you are quite right to despise me—only when I did it, I didn't see that I was doing wrong. I meant it for your good, I did, really. I thought you were ruined, and it would be a noble thing to sacrifice myself to get a little money for you. It was very wicked of me. I can see it now. Oh, Clem, Clem, can't you forgive me for it? Is it to separate us *for ever*. I—I love you as much as I ever did.'

He answered nothing, but a great desire

was entering into his heart, the 'Indifferentism to Universal Matter' was crumbling away, or at least he was trying to assimilate it to his love, and failed dismally. He could not make the two run in harness together.

'I know I have wronged you very deeply, Clem. But I was only a child then, and did not see it in the right light.' She was crying softly all the while. '*Can't* you forgive me? I am so very miserable. I can't make you any amends, but—but I can throw myself on your mercy. It is all I can do, and it is a hard thing for a woman to do. I love you, Clem, as well as I ever did. Oh! have pity on me. Give me a little of your love—a very little.'

Hollebone trembled for a moment—it was the defeat of 'Indifferentism' that caused it, as it took wings and fled.

'Oh, my darling,' he said, 'I love you more than all the world,' and with a little sigh, like a happy child, she threw her arms round his neck, and clinging to him, closed her eyes, while he kissed her again and again. For her it was a paradise of utter joy, and she wept softly and happily, with her head pillowed on his shoulder, silent in a joyful delirium of restful ecstasy.

And he was in hell, and not a hell like M. Rénan's ideal place of future abode, for into the void that the departure of his 'Indifferentism' had created conscience rushed in, and the last state of the man was seven times seven worse than the former. He felt her kisses

showering on his cheeks, as though a rose were shaking its blood-red petals on to his face—and yet, and yet she was a murderess that gave them, and it was by murder she had gained the right and the power to give them, and yet her kisses were so sweet, and fell so softly, like summer rain on parched ground, and he had been yearning for them so long. How could he throw away the power to possess them for ever? And after all—

But suddenly the fire shifted and made him start.

‘I—I *must* go now,’ he said uneasily.

She gave a little moan of discontent.

‘Oh, don’t,’ she said reluctantly. ‘You *do* love me, don’t you?’

And for answer he kissed her again.

‘But do you love me as much as you used to—a year ago?’

‘My darling,’ he said, ‘I love you infinitely more. More than I could have dreamt of then.’

She took her arms lingeringly and wistfully from round his neck.

‘Oh, Clem, I am so glad. You’ll come again soon, won’t you? Because last time when you said you would come again on the next day it—it was a whole year, and everything happened in between. But that is all over and gone, like a nightmare. Oh, Clem, it is so good of you to love me, after I was so wicked—it is so noble!’

He could not trust himself to answer anything, only he kissed her once again and left

her. She was almost glad to be alone with her new-found joy, and sat looking happily in the fire, with nothing to mar the full conviction that her grief was now for ever at an end.

In the meanwhile Hollebone was in an agony of mental conflict. Going down the stairs Julia met him, her face flushed and a new light in her eyes.

‘Why, whatever is the matter, Mr Hollebone?’ she asked. ‘You look ghastly.’

‘I—I don’t know,’ he said. ‘Look here, Julia, do come in next door, I want to speak to you; I must speak to someone or I shall go mad. Please come—I know it will look funny, but what does *that* matter.’

And Julia, after a moment’s hesitation, said,—

‘Very well, I will come. Does Edie want looking after?’

‘No, not directly,’ he answered. ‘Look here, put on a hat and cloak; it’s rather cold outside.’

‘Well, well,’ she said, with a smile, ‘I suppose I must obey you.’

In a moment they were out in the open air.

‘Look here, Julia,’ he said, ‘do you mind walking a little way up the road with me? I am afraid to say what I have got to say in the house for fear someone should overhear it.’

For a time they walked on in silence. The evening was coming on wearily, with a drizzling rain from over the sea, and from the naked branches of the trysting-tree, under which they halted, great drops of water fell heavily into the mud under foot. In mo-

mentary silence he nursed his misery of soul, and she her dread of what he was about to say. A raven that sat at the tree-top above put his head on one side curiously and surveyed them microscopically, seeking for any sign of a gun in his hands, but he felt reassured on seeing that neither of them was carrying so much as a stick. Without a gun a human being is a person to be despised. And the raven sat quietly wondering what kept his mate so late on the seashore. 'I wish one of these two would speak ; this silence is trying to my nerves,' the raven said to himself, with a gape of its bill. Suddenly, so suddenly that the raven started in surprise, Hollebone said,—

'Oh, Julia, I am the most miserable fellow in the world.'

'Oh, come,' she said, 'what nonsense. Whatever is the matter with you now? Has Edith been blowing you up? It would serve you right if she did.'

'No—oh, no. It's not that,' he answered, shivering in spite of himself.

'Well, then, what is it?' Julia said, and feeling herself giving way rapidly, she went on almost hysterically. 'Now, look here, Clement Hollebone. I think you are behaving—and have behaved—like a blackguard. You ought to be proud that Edith should condescend to love a vain, worthless man like yourself. She sacrificed herself for you in a way that no other woman would have dreamt of—and you, like a—well, never mind—you allow your petty

self-love to be wounded, and taunt her while her husband was alive, and now when he is dead you are villain enough to triumph over her love, so that in her nobleness of character she believes that she is the guilty party, that she has wronged *you*—you who are not worthy to be trodden on by her.’

‘But, good God, Julia, she murdered her husband—and with *my* poison. God help me!’

Julia started. (The raven in the tree had been joined by his mate, and they were both on the alert, wondering what she would answer.) She had been dreading lest he should say this—dreading with her whole soul—and she echoed his last words to gain a moment of time before pouring forth her answer like a torrent.

‘God help you! Yes, go to Him for help—for if ever man stood in need of His mercy you do—you dastard; and if ever man has committed murder—yes, *murder*—and broken a true woman’s heart, through his own petty vanity, it was you, Clement Hollebone. To flatter yourself with sham ideas of fortitude you abandoned that poor child—for she was a child then—abandoned her when she stood most in need of you, instead of going to her and comforting her in her distress when you were ruined, or supposed to be. Instead of comforting her in spite of her parents you write to her coldly and give her permission to break off the engagement. Do you think that a woman such as Edith is, cared for your money? Is that the sort of love you ex-

pected from her? You did it in order to vaunt your honourable character, to flatter your own vanity, in fact, by proving to yourself what a very honourable gentleman you were. And you left her to herself, to pine with a half broken heart, instead of coming to comfort her in spite of her parents. That is your honour again. And then in her great chivalrous love she sacrifices herself to gain money for you—and you, instead of wondering at her love, so far above your own, your petty vanity is wounded, and you scorn her and taunt her until, in despair at your hardness of heart, she murders her senile, villainous husband. What other woman would have had the courage? She chains herself to this old devil, and undergoes a terrible servitude, and then even risks her own life—all out of her great love for you—and you, instead of rejoicing to have won so great and noble a love, go about wringing your hands, saying you are the most miserable fellow alive. Oh, if ever man was wicked it was you. You have made Edith go so far as to imperil her own life for the sake of you. You have ruined her life—and even now you can dare to hesitate about the *one* step that can make some small amends to her.'

And Hollebone was so broken down with the new light that Julia had thrown upon Edith's character and upon his own that he could only answer,—

'Thank you, Julia. I will marry her as soon as she will have me.'

And Julia said,—

‘You had better be quick, then, or something else will get her. You know that as well as I, although you shut your eyes to it.’

Hollebone shuddered,—

‘Oh God, Julia,’ he said, ‘why do you torment in this heartless manner? You know how I love her. I will take her off to Italy at once—but, oh God! I *couldn't* lose her now.’

They turned homewards in silence.

(But the ravens in the tree shook their heads.

‘What shocking ideas that woman had about morals,’ they said one to the other.

And the male said to his mate,—

‘H'm. It seems to me that the best thing I can do to show my love for you, my dear, if the winter is at all severe, will be to peck you to death and then eat you. In that way you will be saved the pain of seeing me starve, and I shall be able to live through the winter—that is, if it is at all severe.’

But his mate objected very strongly to this way of proving her lord's affection.

‘Besides,’ she said reassuringly, ‘the winter is sure to be mild, there are so very few berries on the trees; and as the finches say, God always sends great store of hips and haws if the winter is to be long or severe.’

But the other shook his head.

‘Stuff and nonsense,’ he said. ‘I am an atheist,’ and he went to sleep pondering over Julia's words.

It is a remarkable fact that no less than

five different theories to account for the unusual scarcity of ravens were mooted during the course of the next winter, which *did* after all turn out to be severe. Personally I am inclined to fear that it was mostly owing to Julia's rash apologia for murder. Ravens are very communicative birds.)

In the meantime Hollebhone had sought out Edith in almost trembling eagerness.

'My dearest,' he said passionately, 'why should we wait any longer? Let us be married at once—as soon as you are able to move.'

She looked up at him, oh so gladly, in her joy at his new-found eagerness.

'Oh, Clem, I wish we could—but what would people say? It would look so like disrespect to Mr Ryves's memory. It is so *very* soon after his death.'

It made him shudder that little speech, it sounded so unnecessarily hypocritical, but he drew himself together.

'Oh, Edith,' he said, 'what does it matter what people say? We love each other, and besides, why should anyone know anything about it? We can be married in Manchester in absolute secrecy and go abroad directly afterwards.'

'But I'm sure my mother and father would object. They are so terribly conventional, and besides, my mother will be disappointed if she does not get at least one fine marriage ceremony out of me. However, I suppose I mustn't make any objections. But I think it would be better to be married in London.

I could go back with Julia and be married from the old house, because I wouldn't like to marry against my father's expressed wishes; besides, mother would be sure to let the whole of Manchester into the secret if she knew anything about it. Oh, Clem, I am so happy, and it doesn't seem as if I deserved it. But somehow, Clem, you know, you don't seem quite happy. Not as you used to be, at least. What is the matter?'

'The matter?' said Hollebone, laughing uneasily. 'There's nothing the matter with me. Only, I love you too much.'

'Oh, Clem,' she said, 'you can never love me *too* much, at least for me. But it doesn't seem to me as if it was that—I mean, as if you were in love. When I am in love I am quite different. Oh dear, what nonsense I am talking. I'm just like a baby. But I am so happy. Only you—you seem as if you had some secret that you were keeping from me. Come now, tell me, have you any secret? Say "Yes" or "No." Now you sha'n't try to put off my questions with kisses. Yes or no?'

Hollebone shook his head, he was too agitated within himself to trust to words.

'Well, I suppose you haven't, then,' she retorted, 'and if you're a very good boy I'll tell you a very great secret. Only, you mustn't tell it to anyone—will you?'

'No, of course not,' he said. 'What is it?'

'Julia is going to be married.'

'The deuce she is!' said Hollebone. 'Who to?'

‘Why, to young Mr Ryves. But it’s a great secret. They’re to be married very soon, without anybody’s knowing about it—and what do you think they’re going to do?’

‘I give it up. Don’t ask me another.’

‘Why, he’s going to buy a farm out in New Zealand, and they’re going over there to start life afresh. Isn’t that a funny idea?’

‘Well, I don’t know,’ Hollebone said. ‘If one is to believe what rumour says about him, he rather wants to start life afresh—in a country where he’s not known.’

‘He always seemed a very nice young man to me,’ Edith said. ‘But the funniest part of it is—I promised Julia not to tell—he is going to give up the whole of his fortune, and only keep sufficient to exist upon.’

‘What’s he going to do with it, anyhow? He can’t throw three millions of money into the sea.’

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ Edith said. ‘It is for some socialist scheme of his. He is going to turn his father’s business into a colossal co-operative company, with the workmen as shareholders. But that is a great secret, and you’re not supposed to know anything about it. So you mustn’t let Julia know I’ve told you. But don’t let’s talk about them any more. Let’s talk about us. When shall I be well enough to start for town?’

‘Not for a week or ten days yet, I’m afraid.’

‘Julia is not to be married for a month. I should like to be married before her, because—’

‘Because you’re a conceited baby,’ said Hollebone, with a little of his old jocularly returning. ‘Now go to bed, dearest, and don’t let yourself get over-excited,’ and with a little sigh of contented reluctance she let him go.

‘Oh, by-the-bye,’ she said, as he was leaving the room, ‘send Julia up to me—will you, please?’

Obedient to her behest, on going downstairs he knocked at random at the dining-room door, and a voice said, ‘Come in.’ He put his head in at the door.

‘Oh, is it you, Dr Hollebone? Can I do anything for you?’

It was young Ryves who spoke.

‘Oh, no, thank you. You don’t happen to know where Miss Tubbs is?’ Hollebone asked.

But the other answered,—

‘No—that is, I believe she is in her room. Do you wish to see her? Shall I ring for a servant?’

‘Yes, if you please,’ Hollebone said. ‘That is, I do not want to see her myself. Edith—I mean Mrs Ryves—told me she wished to see her.’

‘Oh, very well. I will ring the bell.’

‘If you wouldn’t mind,’ said Hollebone. ‘Thank you. Good evening.’

‘Oh, by-the-bye, Dr Hollebone,’ the other said, ‘would it be troubling you to let me have a minute of your time?’

‘Not at all,’ said Hollebone, wondering inwardly what on earth the fellow could want. ‘Is anything wrong with your health?’

‘Oh, no,’ he answered, with a smile. ‘Excuse me—oh, Parker, would you tell Miss Tubbs that your mistress wishes to speak to her? Now I won’t detain you a minute. Please sit down.’

Hollebone did so, trying to realise that he had, adopting Julia’s train of reasoning, murdered his interlocutor’s father, but the sensation was too new and strange for him to grasp the horror of it fully. Meanwhile the young man began,—

‘It is only about Dr Hammond’s children that I am anxious to speak to you. You are, I believe, Dr Hammond’s sole executor, and the guardian of the children?’

Hollebone assented, wondering what it could possibly matter to the young man.

‘I don’t know anything about Dr Hammond’s affairs, but I believe his property was excessively small. That, at least, was my father’s impression, and he has left me instructions to provide for the children should such be the case.’

Under ordinary circumstances Hollebone would have felt somewhat insulted at this speech, but there was an earnestness about the young millionaire that precluded entirely such a feeling, and he answered,—

‘Oh, thank you, the children are amply provided for.’

Ryves seemed slightly embarrassed.

‘There are, however, certain reasons,’ he went on, ‘which I am not at liberty to disclose to you, which led my father to order me

to give, in his name, a certain sum to the children, and I feel it my duty to carry out his wishes—almost his last wishes. I therefore intend to pay in to your bankers, as their guardian, sufficient Government stock to give the son two hundred pounds a year, and each of the daughters one hundred and fifty. I hope this will not offend you in any way, but you will understand my motives. It was my father's wish.'

And Hollebone answered,—

'Oh, no, I am not in the least offended. On the contrary, I am delighted, for the children's sakes.'

'Oh, thank you,' the other said, with a relieved air. 'Then that is settled. I will send the order off at once. Your patients are going on well I hope?'

Hollebone assented.

'Oh, yes,' he said. 'Mrs Ryves will be quite well very shortly, and her mother, I am glad to say, is much better. I have persuaded her to return to Manchester to-morrow. The place is too damp for her.'

The other listened abstractedly to Hollebone's somewhat stiff speech. To tell the truth they were both somewhat ill at ease, and for a moment there was an uncomfortable silence. Suddenly Ryves seemed to take a swift resolve.

'Look here, Hollebone,' he said, 'I am going to be unpardonably rude to you, if you take it that way, but I don't wish to be. Julia has been speaking to me about my step-

mother, and I must tell you in common justice that my father treated her in a most cruel way. In fact, up to the very day of his death, he was engaged in torturing her with a diabolical ingenuity, but before his death he begged me, in a letter, to repair any harm he might have done as far as lay in my power. I am unfortunately not able to recompense her in any way for what she has suffered, but I believe you are, and—and I am only begging for your assistance. I mean, pray do not let consideration for my father's memory stand in between her happiness and herself. If you will believe me, the best way to honour his memory will be to try and make her forget him. He was very cruel to her during his life, but he sincerely wished to make her reparation. I hope you do not feel hurt at what I have said. I may not have expressed myself very well, but it seemed to be my duty to say something, and—pray forgive me if I have hurt you.'

But Hollebone replied,—

'Oh, thank you. I hardly know how to thank you sufficiently for your delicacy. I am going to marry Edith as soon as she is well enough to bear the ceremony.'

And he left the room. Somehow, in the presence of Ryves, he felt himself at a disadvantage. The man was such a perfect gentleman, full of sincerity and delicacy—and besides, one cannot feel entirely at ease in the presence of a man whose father one has killed. This one idea had possessed itself of his brain,

and he suffered most terribly under it. He was too busy to give himself much time to think. There were so many things to be arranged. Firstly, to dispose of the practice to the best advantage would require considerable time, and as he had but ten days' time in which to get rid of it he did not make a very good bargain out of it. But by superhuman efforts he managed to get a qualified practitioner installed on probation, and even introduced to his patients, all under the ten days. Next Gandon became the subject under consideration, and he came to the conclusion that the best thing to do with him was to send him to a boarding-school, where he was to receive maternal care and attention to his moral welfare in addition to the usual course of studies. Having unearthed such a school by application to the daily papers, thither Master Gandon was accordingly despatched, with his pockets rattling with pocket-money and his boxes encumbered with jam, apples, and home-made cake, and there he remains to this day, having by dint of hard knuckles and still harder skull won his way to respect and reverence.

Little Maud and her sister proved more difficult to dispose of, but the wife of one of her mother's brothers offered to take them, under the charge of the faithful Mary Ann, into her house until Hollebone returned from abroad. A general exodus took place from Dymchurch.

The Ryves' servants were all sent back to

Blackstone Edge, pending their dismissal. Julia and Edith returned once more to the house by the park in London from which the story had opened out, and thus it fell about that one evening Hollebone and Edith were sitting in the drawing-room by the light of the fire alone. Edith had been playing, in a desultory manner, dreamy snatches of melody, resolutions from the minor into the relative major, and the sound of the violin seemed to be hanging, inaudible, in the mysterious dark corners of the room. Edith was leaning her face on her hand, looking dreamily at the fire. From the next room came the sound of voices.

‘Oh, Clem,’ Edith said suddenly, ‘I am so happy.’

‘Are you, dearest?’ Hollebone said, with a half sigh.

‘Yes, Clem. It—it seems as if the whole of that year, that dreadful year, had never happened—as if it had been quite blotted out. You—you have quite forgiven me, haven’t you, Clem—quite?’

‘I—forgiven you—I had nothing to forgive,’ he said. ‘I was a brute ever to have been angry with you, and to-morrow—’

‘To-morrow by this time we shall be in Paris,’ Edith said shyly.

Hollebone felt happy in his love, in spite of the dreadful thought that was weighing him down. Somehow it was still too terrible for him to grasp.

In the meantime Julia and her lover were sitting in the next room.

‘Julia,’ he was saying, ‘I have done everything I can to repair the wrongs that my father did. It only remains for me to mature my scheme for disposing of my father’s fortune, and then we will start life afresh.’

For a moment there was silence, and then he began again.

‘Oh, Julia, I have no right to drag you away with me. We shall lead a hard life, and besides, you are a great pianist, and I am taking you away from fame and—’

But Julia interrupted him, calmly and steadfastly.

‘What would be the good of fame or anything to me if I am to be separated from you? Besides, you are a far greater author than I can ever hope to be as a pianist, and if you can throw away all claims to greatness in order to repair injuries that your father has done surely I can do it to follow the man I love.’

He held his peace for a moment, as though he were meditating deeply.

‘I think it is best that we should leave the country. We have neither of us any ties to bind us to it. I, you know, I’ve not been altogether what I ought to have been, but if I am to begin again it would be better to begin where there are no associations to drag me back; besides, we have got to live, and it is so difficult to make a living here. It will be different in a new country.’

Again there was a silence.

Suddenly he put his hand in his pocket and drew out a small phial.

‘Oh, by-the-bye, Julia,’ he said, ‘I meant to ask you about this. It seems to be a poison that Hollebhone invented and gave to my step-mother before she married my father. At least I gather as much from the inscription on the label.’

Julia started visibly.

‘What do you mean?’ she said. ‘Give it me. Where did you get it?’

‘Oh, I found it only this morning, in a dressing-case that used to belong to my father, but—’

‘But,’ Julia interrupted, in horrified amazement, ‘the seal *isn't* broken, and I thought—’

‘What?’ the young man asked, somewhat astonished.

‘I thought—Clement told me that Edith—’
She stopped again.

‘What on earth do you mean?’ her lover asked, and then gathering her meaning from her eyes, he said, ‘Does he think that she murdered my father?’

Julia held her finger to her mouth.

‘Hush, James. Yes, I thought so too. We were both mad.’

‘And was he going to marry her with that suspicion hanging over her?’

Julia nodded.

‘I will let him do it as it is before I tell him. It will teach him a lesson.’

But her lover’s eyes lit up with wonder.

‘By Jove!’ he said, ‘how he must love her—almost as much as I love you.’ But, becoming grave again, he said, ‘Oh, Julia, there was

something else I meant to tell you—about my own mother. I only learnt that, too, the other day, and I have been trying to muster up courage ever since, for somehow I didn't think it would be right, if I had repaired all the wrongs my father and I have done, to start again by deceiving you. I—I—Well, here is what my father wrote to me, in a letter that was to be only opened after his death. Will you read it now? You—you won't throw me over on that account?'

He grew very white, and fidgeted with his watch chain. But Julia leant over him and kissed his forehead gently.

'What difference does it make?' she said.

On the next day Hollebone and Edith were married by special licence, and in a terrible hurry, in order to catch the boat-train at eleven. Hollebone had taken the luggage down to the station the day before, and its registration was safely accomplished; but even with that precaution there was a considerable rush for the train, so much so that Julia had some difficulty in catching Hollebone's attention for a moment.

'Here is a little wedding present for you.' It was a sealed packet. 'Don't open it till you are alone,' she said, and Edith from the carriage window called out,—

'Now then, Clem, hurry up, or I shall be jealous. You mustn't go on like that now,' and an urbane ticket collector suggested that the train was about to start and that

Hollebone stood a chance of being left behind.

Therefore with all haste he ascended the steps into the carriage and the door was locked. The ticket collector winked at the guard and discreetly withdrew.

'Good-bye, Ju,' said Edith. 'Kiss me. I'm so happy.'

'Good-bye, Miss Tubbs,' Hollebone said.

'I'm not Miss Tubbs any longer,' she said, with a triumphant side glance at Edith.

'What do you mean?' said that young lady sharply.

Julia had not time to answer, the train was moving off, but she held up one finger of her gloveless hand.

Edith sank back into her seat with a little frown.

'The spiteful cat,' she said. '*Won't* I write her a letter from Paris. They must have been married this morning before us. It's a shame.'

She relapsed into silence that became breathless agony as the train backed into Cannon Street.

'I hope no one is going to get into the carriage,' she said; but the adroit guard quite appreciated her sentiments, and with skill, born of long practice, succeeded in staving off all threatening disturbers of her peace of mind, and as the train moved out of the station she nestled down once more against Hollebone's side.

'The train doesn't stop again, does it?' she said.

‘Not until Folkestone,’ he answered.

‘Oh, Clem, it’s like a dream,’ she said for the fiftieth time at least.

And the train rattled and jolted through the Kentish land, green with the promise of spring. But I am afraid that neither of them noticed the primroses that were already carpeting the banks of the railway line, or the green haze of new buds that hung over the brown hazel copses. ‘Love’s blind,’ they say.

At anyrate the guard at the Harbour Station remarked to a friendly porter, ‘That honeymoon compartment pays me better than all the rest of the train put together.’

Unfortunately the guards on the other side of the Channel are not so expert, or the train was rather full—at anyrate from Boulogne to Amiens they both felt discontented, for a Gallic stranger occupied one corner of their compartment. It is true he neither spoke nor understood a word of English, and remained the whole time buried behind a copy of *Le Matin*, but still he was corporeally present, and the mere presence of an elderly foreigner, wearing an extravagant travelling cap and a little red button in the top hole of his overcoat, is sufficient to make a newly wedded couple sit on opposite sides of a railway carriage, and *that* means that they must limit themselves to pressing each other’s feet—a tantalising occupation, of which even Edith grew tired after an hour and a half—and, not having slept a wink for three nights previously, she felt an overpowering drowsi-

ness coming over her, and letting her head fall back on to the cushions behind she was soon asleep, leaving Hollebone gazing disconsolately at the scenery. In these straits he bethought himself of the packet that Julia had given him, and extracting it from his pocket, he proceeded to open it, disclosing the little crystal phial, intact, sparkling in the light. The seal was still unbroken; moreover, he could see there was no diminution in its contents.

‘My God!’ he said to himself, ‘what a fool I have been—a preposterous idiot to suspect Edie in such a ridiculous manner. Good Heavens! what would she think of me if she came to know about it? Supposing Julia were to write and tell her for a joke.’

The bare idea made him feel sick and faint.

The French gentleman on the other side happened to be refreshing himself from a pocket flask, and observing Hollebone’s white face, he smiled.

‘Monsieur a toujours mal de mer?’ he asked. ‘Permettez,’ and bending forward he held the flask to him. At this important juncture Hollebone’s knowledge of the French tongue deserted him. He was thinking of other things, and all he could manage to say was,—

‘Non, merci, je ne bois pas.’

The other looked puzzled, but a light shot into his face, and he said, with a smile,—

‘Ah! monsieur, veut dire qu’il est “*ti tôt à l’heure?*”’¹

¹ *Teetotaler.*

Hollebone gasped.

'Oui, oui, mais merci, merci millefois,' and at this moment the train rattled into Amiens. Edith awoke, and the French gentleman descended with his goods and chattels.

'Are you hungry, darling?' Hollebone asked. 'Shall we have something to eat?'

'What, aren't we there?' she asked. 'I thought this was Paris.'

'Oh, no,' he said, 'it's only Amiens. Another couple of hours yet. Shall we get out and have something?'

'Oh no,' she said. 'I'm not a bit hungry. Has that French wretch gone? Let's put the bags on the seats and move up to the door end to make the carriage look full. Stand up in the doorway so that people can't see in.'

Thus, by means of skilful arrangement, people seeking places were deceived, and when the train moved out of the station their carriage was once more empty but for them.

'Ah! that's nice—now sit down. Oh! Clem, I wish we could never get to Paris, and stopped like this always—for ever and ever! But what's the matter with you—you're quite dull. Aren't you well?'

'No, I'm all right, dearest,' he answered. 'Only, I'm too happy to be lively.'

'I don't believe it. You're a lazy boy and don't want to talk to me, and you aren't squeezing *half* as tight as you can. I believe you're tired of me already.'

To tell the truth Hollebone's mind was occupied by a new dread. Having got rid of the murder theory altogether, he was tormenting himself with the anticipation of Edith's scorn when she heard how he had suspected her; and as the train rattled on his dread grew to a perfect agony by the time they were nearing Paris.

By one of those mysterious but seemingly immutable dispensations of Providence, which provides that no stranger to the city shall enter Paris from the north without being fumigated by the vilest of odours, the signals at St Denis were against the train, and they must needs stop still for a considerable space of time. The train had lately been rattling so loudly as to utterly preclude conversation; but now it fell to dead silence, and the voices in the next compartment became confusedly audible.

'Where are we? What are we stopping for?' she asked petulantly.

'Why, we seem to be near St Denis,' he said, 'to judge from the smell; but it's so smoky on this side you can't see Paris.'

The sun was setting over the city in a purple glory of April clouds and smoke.

'Oh, *is that* Paris?' she said, turning to the window. 'What a shame it's so misty. I thought it was only in London we had fogs. I can't see anything—only red clouds and smoke.'

The golden red from the west, glowing on her face and hair, made her look so wonder-

fully dreamlike that Hollebone groaned to think that now that she was his he might have forfeited her heart by a preposterous suspicion.

'Why, whatever is the matter, Clem?' she asked, turning suddenly. 'You look perfectly wretched. Have *I* done anything to annoy you?'

'Oh, forgive me, forgive me, my darling,' he said, clasping her disengaged hand.

'Why, whatever for, Clem? You haven't done anything to harm me.'

'It was about the poison,' he said, hardly knowing what his words meant.

'Oh, the poison,' she said, turning a little pale. 'I—I lost it. It was stolen. You aren't angry with me for that?'

'No, thank God, my darling. But oh, Edith, I was mad enough, vile enough to believe, until almost a minute ago, that you had killed your husband with it. Can you forgive me for *that*?'

She looked at him, with her lips parted in astonishment.

'You thought I had committed a murder, and *yet* you married me!' The tears came into her eyes, and she threw her arms round his neck, and, trembling, hid her face. 'Oh, Clem, how glad I am, how glad I am! I don't think even *I* love you as well as that. I don't think I could have married you if I thought you had committed a murder. Oh, Clem, Clem! How good you are to me. How much you must have loved me!'

The glory faded from the sky as the train rattled forward.

.
The Past, with its struggles and heart burnings, was dead—only the good that adversity had brought out in their characters remained.

This was what it had taught them :
'How you must have loved me !'

THE END.



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