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GEORGE GEITH -OF FEN COURT.





**GEORGE GEITH**

OF

**FEN COURT.**

**A Novel.**

BY **F. G. TRAFFORD,**

AUTHOR OF "TOO MUCH ALONE," ETC.

**BOSTON:**

**T. O. H. P. BURNHAM.**

**NEW YORK: O. S. FELT.**

**1865.**



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To

ALEXANDER JOHNS, ESQ.,

OF SUNNYLANDS, GARRICKFERGUS,

IN THANKFUL REMEMBRANCE OF KIND ADVICE, OF CORDIAL  
ENCOURAGEMENT, AND OF VALUABLE ASSISTANCE,

*This Book*

IS DEDICATED BY HIS OLD FRIEND,

*THE AUTHOR.*





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## GEORGE GEITH OF FEN COURT.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### INTRODUCTORY.

**QUITE** close to Fenchurch Street — within a few yards of that noisy and crowded thoroughfare — there lies hidden away as quiet and forsaken-looking a spot as the heart of man need desire to see.

It is called Fen Court, and I should like to take my readers thither. We have paced the City pavements together before now, and I am glad to be threading the familiar streets and alleys in good company again.

A narrow covered passage affords ingress to Fen Court, which is but a portion of the graveyard once attached to St. Gabriel, one of the many churches destroyed by the Great Fire of 1666, and never rebuilt. The parish was subsequently united to that of St. Margaret Pattens, and this little piece of ground is all that now remains to tell us of a church past which flowed the clear waters of Langbourne.

It is beside the bones of those who peopled London in those days that we are standing. Shall we sit down for a moment on the churchyard wall, and leaning back against the iron railings, think of the City they knew before commencing this commonplace story of modern men and modern doings?

Not a stone's-throw from us stand the lordly Priory of the

Holy Trinity ; not far from thence the House of the Crutched Friars ; close by that the Abbey of the Nuns of St. Clare, while beyond the Minories stretched away those fields which Stowe traversed in after days ; and, beyond the fields, Ratcliffe swamps.

Returning through one of the posterns of Aldgate, we arrive again at the Priory of the Holy Trinity and find ourselves at once in an aristocratic quarter.

Here resided Sir Thomas Audley, who, dying in 1544, was succeeded by his son-in-law the Duke of Norfolk, from whom "Duke's Place." That narrow alley which now conducts from Fenchurch Street into Crutched Friars took its name from Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, who had his mansion hard by in the reign of Henry VI. ; and whilst monks and nuns and lords and ladies, were settling themselves down at this — which was then about the extremest eastern point of the City — all the road from St. Catherine Coleman, where Langbourne took its rise, was little better than a swamp, to say nothing of the fens and marshes out by Aldgate, and Moorgate, and Finsbury, which occupied the place of the lake that once washed the City walls.

It is not easy to believe in these things now. Thinking of the City as we think of it at the present day, it seems almost incredible that three hundred years since, letters for his Grace the Archbishop of York were forwarded to Tower Hill ; whilst but half that period has elapsed since a Countess of Devonshire lived in Devonshire Square, Bishopsgate — not in solitude, but surrounded by much gay company — the last lady of rank who clung to the City.

There is no need to look scornful about the matter, most beautiful matron, though you may read this book in a house in Belgravia — for though the City be unfashionable now, no man may ever blot its ancient glory, or its present power and strength, out of the page of history. Not all Pickford's wagons can destroy its romance — not all the ninth of November mummery can efface the recollection of those days



when City pageants were symbols of a real power — not all the feet that tramp across Tower Hill can obliterate the mournful histories written on its dust; churches and graveyards, mean courts and narrow alleys, thronged streets and quiet lanes; there is not one of these but repeats its old world tale, of misery and joy, in the ear of the attentive listener. In the dim summer twilight we tread softly through the deserted thoroughfares, feeling that the ground whereon we stand is hallowed — by human suffering — by human courage — by valor and by woe!

But, after all, it is around the City churches that the most interesting memories of olden time cluster.

What story is there that the old walls will not repeat at our bidding? From St. Paul's down, each has its own monuments, its own records — its own separate portion of the narrative of ancient days. Close by where we are now sitting, are some of these old churches, and, from one and another, the soft evening breeze brings whispers of the greatness and the sorrow they contain.

Underneath the high altar of All-Hallows, Barking, lies, crumbling to dust, a heart which knew no such repose in life.\* In the same church, sleep Surrey the poet, and Bishops Laud and Fisher, who were executed on the adjacent Tower Hill; whilst a little to the north, stands St. Katharine Cree, where, in (for him) more prosperous days, Laud and his fat chaplains laid themselves open to the sarcasm of Prynne, whose description of the consecration of that church will be remembered so long as the history of ancient London has any charms for readers. Near to St. Katharine Cree we find St. Andrew Undershaft, which brings with its name thoughts of Spring and May, and garlands and festivity, as well as sadder memories of the great City historian, who, at eighty years of age, begged his bread by royal license, and whose bones were moved from under his own monument to make way for those of a richer comer.

\* Richard Cœur-de-Lion.



Close by there is another All-Hallows, besides Barking, where the Princess Elizabeth flew to give thanks for her release from the Tower — attracted thither, so runs the pleasant story, by the joyful ringing of its bells.

Almost within a stone's-throw, what a number of churches there are! — St. Mary-at-Hill, St. Dunstan's in the East, St. Margaret Pattens, St. Catherine Coleman, Aldgate, St. Benet, and St. Dionsis Backchurch; whilst just beyond the wicket-gate stood St. Gabriel, in the almost forgotten graveyard of which we sit.

Were all the City houses — all the long lines of streets, all the closely-packed warehouses, all the overflowing shops — swept away, the City churches would still form a town of themselves.

Dreaming here, we cannot but marvel what this place was like when both houses and churches were destroyed — when London was one broad sheet of flame, and its inhabitants were camped out in the open fields, looking at the ruin which was being wrought.

Do you not wonder what the congregations were thinking about on that Sunday morning when the conflagration began? How many were making up their minds about the removal of their worldly goods — how many thinking of the great and terrible day of the Lord — how many shivering with fear — thought, to quote the Rev. T. Vincent, that, into those churches which were in flames, "God himself had come down to preach in them as He did in Mount Sinai, when the mount burst into fire."

Doubtless some of those who sleep inside the rusty railings against which we lean, beheld these things — saw the City depopulated by plague, and purified by fire — followed the dead-carts — looked down into the pits — hurried from the conflagration — witnessed executions on Tower Hill — attended the theatricals in the churchyard of St. Katharine Cree — and followed royalty, when kings and queens rode in state through the streets.

The very stones in this part of London talk to us eloquently of the past. Under the houses spring the arches of almost forgotten churches — in dim aisles stand stately monuments — in narrow lanes, mansions, once occupied by the nobility. The dust of great and good, and notorious and suffering men, has mingled long ago with the earth on which we tread, and there is scarcely an inch of ground but has some story or tradition connected with it.

If ghosts could return to their former haunts, what a congress should we behold in these old world streets !

Think of Tower Hill ! What a regiment of headless men and women would draw up there, and march to Westminster, to meet the spirits of their oppressors ! Think if the vaults were unsealed, and the graves opened, and the wrong, and the sin, and the cruelty, and the misery of the past suffered to escape into the night, what a ghastly procession would meet us at every turning !

And, as it is, the ghosts we encounter in fancy while threading the older parts of London, set us reflecting about the bodies we shall see at the Day of Judgment.

Giving the imagination leave but to peep into the City churchyards — letting it have only a glimpse of that horrid foundation on which Windmill Street and the adjacent thoroughfares stand — suffering it to think of the graves lying deep under the City houses — it is not so difficult to realize what that mighty gathering will be like when the dead, small and great, shall stand before God, and be judged according to their works.

Fen Court is just the place for such pictures to be perfected. We are seated in the past with its dead, while up the passage comes to us the muffled roar of the life and traffic of the present.

We are not looking from the present into the past, we are for the moment existing in the years gone by. It is the din of our day which is the dream, and the memories of the olden time that are the reality.

There is not a sound to dispel the charm — not a footfall to break the silence. The murmur of the human tide, ebbing and flowing through Fenchurch Street, disturbs the illusion no more than if it were the thunder of the sea. The few offices in Fen Court are closed. The children who come here to play have been in bed this half-hour — the sparrows have chirped themselves to sleep on the branches overhead. There is a great virtue of stillness stealing down many a lane, and into many a court and alley, for it is now getting dusk in the City, and the summer twilight brings silence on its quiet wings.

Unless you know the City well — know it, I mean, in all its moods and tenses — this statement may well surprise you, for there is a general impression abroad, that London is never quiet, except it may be from two to three o'clock, A. M., when, a comparatively recent writer states, that “Riot, Profligacy, Want, and Misery, have retired, and Labor is scarcely risen.”

Nevertheless, I repeat my assertion, for the great stillness which seems suddenly to fall on the City with the summer semi-darkness, has always appeared to me little short of marvellous.

In the winter it is different. Life hurries along the pavements at a quicker rate under the gas-lamps than under the dull November sky; the traffic of the day, increased if anything, rolls through the muddy streets; there is no end to the women one meets going shopping; across the bridges people pour ceaselessly; omnibuses are crowded; cab horses are whipped into that three-foot gallop which proclaims the last stage of weariness; St. Paul's Churchyard is thronged with ladies to whom the goods displayed in the shop-windows offer attractions impossible to withstand; behind the counters, pale young men strive with seductive smiles and graceful arrangements of ribbons and dresses to bring undecided customers to a decision, whilst in the back streets girls pour out of work-rooms and fill up the

narrow side-paths, with groups of slight, delicate-looking, thinly clad, giggling chatterers.

The winter evening brings with its darkness turmoil and unrest, but the summer twilight falls softly on silent lanes and empty thoroughfares.

The offices are closed, the shopkeepers have put up their shutters, the human passions, fears, hopes, joys and sorrows, that seethed along the pavement during the day, have been carried by their possessors miles distant, to the far off sea-shore, to the pleasant Surrey hills, or the green Hertfordshire fields.

The housekeepers and the City police are left in possession of the City houses and the City streets, and very gently, night steals on, and silence with it.

Where we sit, it is almost dark already, for the houses and the trees make a shade in Fen Court even at mid-day. Out in the open country, or in the nearer suburbs, it is probably light enough still; but here, on this August evening, it is quite dark, and an increasing feeling of solemnity creeps over us as we sit by the graves in the gloom, whilst the evening breeze stirs softly and mournfully the leaves above our heads.

## CHAPTER II.

## GRANT AND CO.

FEN COURT is far from cheerful now, and except that it was fifteen years younger — which fact could not have made any material difference in its appearance — I do not know that it looked any brighter when George Geith tenanted the second floor of the house which stands next but one to the old gateway, on the Fenchurch Street side, and transacted business there, trading under the firm of “Grant and Co., accountants.”

If quietness were what he wanted, he had it. Except in the summer evenings, when the children of the Fenchurch Street housekeepers brought their marbles through the passage, and fought over them on the pavement in front of the office doors, there was little noise of life in the old churchyard. The sparrows in the trees, or the footfall of some one entering or quitting the Court alone disturbed the silence. The roar of Fenchurch Street on the one side, and of Leadenhall Street on the other, sounded in Fen Court but as a distant murmur; and to a man whose life was spent among figures, and who wanted to devote his undivided attention to his work, this silence was a blessing not to be properly estimated save by those who have passed through that maddening ordeal, which precedes being able to abstract the mind from external influences, and to keep it steady to one object, in spite alike of the rattle of a fire-engine and the thunder of a railway van.

For the historical recollections associated with the locality he had chosen, George Geith did not care a rush.

It was the London of to-day in which he lived and moved and had his being. The London of old was as a sealed book unto him ; and if any one had opened its pages for his benefit, he would not have read a line of the ancient story.

Passing every day by places famous in former times, he never paused to inquire, how and when and why they ceased to be of note. In the present he thought of nothing, cared for nothing, save his business ; and for the rest, his dreams, when he had any, were of the future, not of the past.

What the past held of his — what of struggle, sorrow, resolve, grief, fear — no one was ever likely to learn from George Geith. The people with whom he talked most, did not know whence he had come, what he had been, whither he was bound.

Never a vessel hoisted fewer signals than the accountant. When other men hung out all their poor rags of colors, when they spread the stories of their lives out for public inspection, this auditor remained obstinately mute. Not a word had he to say about home, or friends, or relatives. He made no pretension to having seen better days — to having ever been anything different from what the world then saw him — a struggling man, who worked from early in the morning till late at night, and who seemed to have no thought nor care for anything, save making of money and extending his connection.

He lived with his work, slept in his back office, ate his breakfast while he read his letters, and swallowed his tea, surrounded on all sides by books and balance-sheets, and labyrinths and mazes of figures.

As for his dinner, at whatever hour in the day he could best spare ten minutes, he went to the nearest coffee-house, and had a chop or steak, as the case might be. From which it will be clearly seen that the accountant was not laboring for creature comforts — for rich dishes and old wines, for

soft couches and idle hours ; but that he was working either for work's sake, or for some object far outside the round of his daily and yearly existence.

And what an existence that was ! What a dull, monotonous road it would have seemed to most, unrelieved as it was by social intercourse, unlightened by domestic ties ; with no friend to talk to, no wife to love, no child to caress, no parent to provide for. A lonesome, laborious life, which had little in it, even of change of employment ; for, so soon as one man's books were balanced, or schedule prepared, another merchant or bankrupt stood at the door, and behold, the same routine had to be gone through again. But monotony did not weary the accountant. Give him work enough, and strength sufficient to toil eighteen hours a day, and he was content. If he could have taken more out of himself he would have done it ; but, as that was impossible, he labored through all the working days of the week, and up to twelve o'clock on Saturday nights ; as I hope, you, my reader, may never have to labor for any cause whatsoever.

As is the fashion of the Londoners, those who knew Mr. Geith — whom they called Mr. Grant — ever so slightly, asked him to come to dinner, tea, supper, what he would on Sunday, and because he persistently declined these invitations, people said the accountant worked seven days in the week, on his treadmill in Fen Court.

But in this instance people were wrong. Whether he were a saint or a sinner, George Geith still kept the Sabbath day holy, so far as refraining from labor could keep it so. He put aside his business, and laid down his pen. He went to church, moreover, in the mornings regularly. Sometimes, too, he walked to Westminster Abbey, or to St. Paul's, for afternoon service ; but that was seldom, for he usually slept until tea ; after which meal he started off to one or other of the city churches, making in this way, quite a little visitation of his own during the course of a twelvemonth.

A strange life — one so apparently terrible to an outsider




in its voluntary loneliness, that his clients marvelled how he could support it. And yet, my reader, if I can succeed in putting you on friendly terms with this solitary individual, you will come gradually to understand, why this existence was not unendurable to him.

It is getting dark in Fen Court, as we stand beside the railings in the gathering twilight. The offices have long been closed ; the housekeepers' children have left their marbles and their skipping-ropes, and are gone home to bed. The twitter of the sparrows is hushed, and there is nothing to be heard save the faint hum of the City traffic, and the rustling of the leaves, as the evening breeze touches them caressingly.

It is getting darker and darker, so dark in fact that there is little more to be seen of Fen Court to-night ; but still, have patience for a moment. This man, whose story I have undertaken to tell as well as I am able, has just separated himself from the living stream flowing eastward along Fenchurch Street, and is coming up the passage. You can hear his footsteps ringing through the silence. Hark ! how they echo beneath the archway — quick, firm, even, unhurried. There is no shadow of turning or wavering about that tread. Listen to the footfalls ; you cannot distinguish the left from the right ; there is no drag, no twist, no irregularity. Do you think the man whom nature has taught to walk like that would be a person to refrain from using whip and spur if he had an object to compass ?

I tell you, no. As he passes us in the gloom of the summer evening, unmindful of the graves lying to his left, and deaf to the low, sad tale the wind is whispering among the leaves, I tell you he is a man to work so long as he has a breath left to draw ; who would die in his harness rather than give up ; who would fight against opposing circumstances whilst he had a drop of blood in his veins ; whose greatest virtues are untiring industry and indomitable courage, and who is worth half a dozen ordinary men, if only because of his iron frame and unconquerable spirit.



He has let himself in by this time with his latch-key, taken such letters as are intended for his firm out of the box, and proceeded up the easy, old-fashioned staircase, past the painting hanging on the first landing, and so into his own office, where he lights the gas, which, flaring out across the churchyard, clears a little space for its reflection out of the blackness of the opposite wall.

Night after night the flare and reflection tell the same tale of patient labor, of untiring application.

It seems strange that the figures did not dance before his eyes, and chase each other up and down his desk. With many a one the pence would have nodded across to the pounds, and the shillings become confused with their neighbors' columns; but the accountant suffered his puppets to take no such liberties.

In the course of a year he went through miles of addition without a stumble; what he carried never perplexed him; midway up the shillings he never got crazed as common mortals might, but mounted gallantly to the summit as a racer goes straight to the winning-post, without a pause.

The skeins of silk which, in the old fairy tale, the god-mother gave to her godchild to disentangle were nothing, compared to the arithmetical confusions out of which George Geith produced order. The chaos of figures from whence he managed to extract a fair balance-sheet would have seemed hopeless to any person untrained to passages of arms with the numeration table.

The mass of accounts through which he waded in the space of twelve months was of itself almost incredible. Alps on Alps of figures he climbed with silent patience, and the more Alps he climbed the higher rose great mountains of arithmetic in the background — mountains with gold lying on their summits for him to grasp and possess.

If you would like to see the man who thus labored through the monotonous routine of an accountant's daily life, I do not know that any better opportunity than the

present is likely to occur; for, with one foot stretched wearily on the floor, and the other resting on the rail of his office-stool, he is sitting beside his desk, with the gas-light streaming full on his face, sorting out the letters he has just brought up-stairs with him.

There are eight in all — seven of which he places in a little heap ready to his hand, whilst the other is pushed on one side till the last. He is not handsome, certainly! Too commonplace looking to be the hero of a novel, you object, perhaps; but you are wrong there. Somehow it is these rough-hewn men who stand at the helms of the best craft that sail across the ocean of existence. Looking over the portraits of those who have labored hardest and longest in the fields of science, literature, theology, and human progress, we find that nature has been niggardly with them in the matter of beauty. Possibly the better the quality of her coin, the less pains she takes in stamping it for the world's market; but let this be as it may, I would rather accept George Geith's stern hard face for that of my hero, than have to tell the life's story of a handsomer man.

He was fit for the fight he had to wage; and it is something to be permitted to tell of the struggles of one, who, having elected to go down into the battle, bore the heat and burden of the day, and the agony of the wounds he received during the conflict without a murmur.

A man, moreover, who was able to work, not merely fiercely, but patiently; for whom no task was too long, no labor too severe. Look in his face and see how it is scored all over with the marks of determination and energy; look at the square forehead with two deep vertical lines graven on it, at the dark resolute eyes, at the well-marked unarched brows, at the straight decided nose, at the nostrils that expand and quiver a little when he is struck hard, as will sometimes happen in business — the only sign of feeling ever to be traced in his features.

As for his mouth, were that mass of disfiguring hair away,

you would see how naturally, as his thoughts get to work, his lips compress and harden, not with the mannerism to be noted in weak women and weaker men, but with that fixed rigidity of the muscles never to be found save in a person who is strong mentally, and physically ; strong in planning, in executing, in loving, in hating, for good or for evil.

There are the outward and visible signs of this strength in George Geith, in his face, in his carriage, in his speech, in his movements. As he now sits reading his letters, his disengaged hand lies on the desk clenched, as though he held the purpose and fruition of his life within it.

There is a significance likewise about the fashion of his beard which he wears cut and trimmed carefully ; not a straggling hair is to be seen in the brown mass which covers the lower part of his face like a gorse hedge.

In the days when you, my reader, make this man's acquaintance, hair was no passport to credit, and people wondered at the accountant's defiance of City prejudices ; but they need not have wondered, for he had suffered his beard to grow under the same impulse as that which induces a criminal to stain his skin, and don strange clothes when the police are on his track. In his despair he had dived into the great sea of London life, and when he rose to the surface again he was so changed that not even the parish clerk of Morelands would have recognized him, had he seen the accountant sitting under his official nose.

And yet seven years before, the Reverend George Geith had been well known at Morelands ; but that was in the days when he was curate there, before the night when the one great folly of his youth came home to him in all its bitterness, when he tore the white neckcloth from his throat and flung aside the surplice, and fled from the church to recross her portals, as a servant of God no more.

To London he came to seek his fortune. In a feigned name he sought employment, which he found at last in the offices of Horne Brothers, accountants, Princes Street, City.

For five weary years he stayed there, wandering through labyrinths of figures, and applying himself so closely to learn his business thoroughly, that, when at length he summoned up courage to start on his own account, he carried with him to Fen Court a very respectable number of clients, profitable to him, but so small in the estimation of the great house, that the Hornes suffered them to drop through the large meshes of their trade-net without a regret.

Very patiently he had worked his way on; no business was too paltry or insignificant for him, and thus it came to pass that one man brought another, and one transaction led to more. He had succeeded; he was doing well. Let that suffice for our purpose, without speaking further of the weary toil, of the incessant labor, by which success had been achieved.

Even as Jacob served Laban for Rachel, so George Geith was serving fortune for something which was dear to him as the maid to the patriarch — Freedom. Money could give him freedom, and accordingly for money he toiled.

Let the day be never so long, he fainted not; let the heat be never so intense, he sought no cool shade in which to rest. Onward, ever onward, from early morning till late at night he hastened, turning not to the right hand nor to the left, but keeping the goal of emancipation ever in view, toiled steadily on.

People marvelled how he was able to continue the pace, but they did not know of the whip which was lashing him on. If he were ever to taste the sweets of liberty; if he were ever to resume his proper name and his rightful station in the future, he must work like a slave in the present.

And as a traveller, when seeking some far-off land of golden promise, pauses not to seek rest or companions, in the country through which he is passing, so George Geith, hurrying on his road to freedom, took no heed of the roughness and loneliness of the path he was traversing.

Money was what he lacked; money what he hoped to

gain ; and rocks and stones seemed like smoothest turf under his feet whilst he pressed onward to obtain it.

“ A few years more,” he had been thinking, as he came up the passage, “ a few years more, and I shall have enough to free myself.” And then he entered the house as we have seen.

When he had finished reading his other letters, the accountant lifted that he first laid aside, and slowly turned it over with the air of a person who expected no pleasure to result from the perusal.

It was directed to Grant & Co., Accountants, Fen Court, Fenchurch Street, City ; and the man who opened the letter, knew it came from the only person in London, who could say, for a certainty, that the Rev. George Geith was living, and in England.

As no pleasant news had ever come, or was ever likely to come, to Fen Court through his instrumentality, the accountant pulled out the contents of the envelope leisurely.

Within the outer cover there was an enclosure directed to the Rev. George Geith, which enclosure contained three documents, viz., a note, a letter, and a telegraphic message. The last Mr. Geith read the first, and as he did so his face altered in a moment.

Energy, firmness, and impassiveness, were struck out of it at once by surprise, by an amazement which made him feel like one reading in his sleep. There was no further hesitation after that. He tore open the letter to see what the message really meant ; he seized the note and glanced at the few lines it contained. After that he turned to the telegram once again, and read and re-read it, till the words danced before his eyes.

Was it true ? — was he free ? Had death done for him, in an instant, that which it would have taken years of work, and all the money he could have earned by work, to have accomplished.

Was it certain that this great deliverance had been

effected ; that the incubus of his life was removed ; that the shackles were struck off, and the prison-door opened, and he at liberty to walk forth into that fair land of freedom, which he had left so long, so long ago ?

For a moment the accountant covered his face with his hands, and sat with his eyes shut to assure himself, when he opened them again, he had not been dreaming. Then he read the note and the letter and the telegram once more, and after he had read, he went for a moment into his back office, whence he returned carrying the clerical directory in his hand.

He wanted to see if the name of the clergyman, whose letter lay before him, was to be found in the book. Very eagerly he ran his finger down the page : Claell ; Clafield ; Claik ; Clarke ; Claull ; Claydon ; Clayfield, Arthur ; Clayfield, Charles M. ; Clayfield, Francis — yes, there he was at last ; Clayfield, Honorable Ferdinand G., Vicar of Lute, St. Austills, Trevannick, Cornwall.

He was a reality, then. The thick note-paper, the clerically illegible handwriting, the large seal and imposing crest, had concealed no deception, covered no snare. The person who had cursed his life was dead, and he by consequence free.

Having arrived at which conclusion, the accountant took off his neckcloth, and unfastened his shirt-collar. Each man has his own especial way of evincing happiness, and that was Mr. Geith's.

Further, if he had not done something of the kind he must have suffocated ; even as it was he felt his veins were not large enough to let the blood pour through them. His head seemed full of pain, the gas-light flickered and danced before his eyes, and as he left the desk and walked across the room to his writing-table, he staggered like a drunken man.

And truly the news he had just received was enough to shake the firmness of any one. A man cannot pass from one existence into another without a throe, and the change

which had taken place in George Geith's life was like nothing save passing from the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death, back into the glorious noonday of life, and hope, and youth.

Between the chimes of the clock, liberty had come through the passage, and along the churchyard, and up the stairs, to sit down beside the accountant in his lonely office. At nine he was a slave, at a quarter past nine, free, and striving with a gasp to realize that he was so.

How poor and insignificant any deliverance he could have wrought out for himself in the days to come, seemed to this ! It was like what filing through chains of iron with a rusty nail might be in comparison to having the fetters struck off with a smith's sledge. Death had emancipated him, and he was glad. In that hour he had no pity to spare for the sinner departed ; no prayer to mutter for the soul called so suddenly to its account.

George Geith was neither a very sensitive nor a very scrupulous man ; he was fitted to fight out his fight bravely, but without much compunction, and so he never thought of mingling a regret with his joy, or of baring his head and humbling himself in the dust whilst the chariot of the Lord rolled by. Through the portals of eternity, held open for a moment by the hand of death, he never turned to gaze ; he only looked out over the future of his own life, which he was now free to travel as he pleased.

How he travelled it ; what he made of it, how the bitter folly of his youth, mingled with his cup when it tasted the sweetest and seemed full to the brim with happiness and content, you shall know, reader, if you have patience to follow his fortunes through the pages to come.

Meanwhile he has gone over to his desk again, and, having put aside his letters, got to work. We may go out of the office now and leave him to himself.



## CHAPTER III.

## BUSINESS.

OVER all sorts of human feelings, the Juggernaut of business rolls relentlessly. It spares neither sorrow nor joy in its progress ; and there are no smiles so bright, no tears so bitter that they can drag, even for a moment, the wheels of that inexorable car. Let the sickness be ever so fatal, let the dead in her coffin have been ever so dear, still if business is to go on at all, the sick must be left and the dead forsaken, and the merest details of every-day commercial life attended to, though a man's heart should be breaking. Money must be lodged and paid, bills met, goods sent for shipment, letters answered, customers admitted, though the eyes that were wont to light up the now desolate home are closed, and the voice which made melody in the deserted rooms, is mute forever. Shall sorrow stop the trains, keep vessels in the dock, prevent office-doors being opened? No surely ; nor shall joy, not even such joy as George Geith felt when he opened his eyes on the following morning, and satisfied himself by another perusal of his letter, that the liberty which had come to him the previous night was not a dream. Whether bond or free, it was necessary he should live, and so he thankfully turned himself to business once again, and remained in Fen Court, working as hard, and as fiercely, as ever.

Most men who had been bred up to the church, and compelled to leave it solely by the pressure of external circum-

stances, would, when once that pressure was withdrawn, have seriously considered whether they ought not to return to their old profession.

Not so George Geith, however. He did not feel the old vows bind him. He acknowledged no obligation to return to curate's work and curate's pay. He had settled the matter of relinquishing the church years ago with his own conscience, and although circumstances were much altered since then, he was not the man to reopen a disagreeable controversy with himself, and resume an argument in which, free as he was in the present to choose his course, he would have been sure to get the worst of the discussion. The years which had brought liberty with them had brought likewise a knowledge of his own aptitude for business, and inaptitude for parish work. In the days when he was compelled to make his decision, it had seemed to him a calamity to have to leave the Church; but now the calamity would be to have to return to the Church, to relinquish the busy world of business and profit, the future of wealth and independence, for some country parish, where he should have to try and please the village gossips, be deferential to his rector, christen the laborers' children, bury the poor, and marry those whose banns had first been duly published.

It was not a temporal lot to be coveted by a man of his temperament; and as temporal advantages were the gods of George Geith's idolatry, as loaves and fishes were much more to his taste than any form of spiritual refreshment that could be offered him; as he had in the first instance decided to be a clergyman solely because his father had been one, because his friends wished it, and because there was a desirable living in the Geith family, it will readily be believed that having found there was a more excellent worldly way to rank and wealth and ease, he was not likely to return to the path he had abandoned, and become either a poor curate, with good connections certainly, but without private means, or the hanger-on of a great house, the windows whereof com-

manded a view of the smoke curling up from the chimneys of Great Snareham Rectory.

From the clerical directory he knew that the old incumbent was still alive; and he knew, likewise, that his aunt, Lady Geith, and his cousin, Sir Mark, would give him the living whenever it fell in, and settle the question of his sudden flight from Morelands, and long absence from the Church, with the Bishop, whilst that dignitary ate his luncheon at Snareham Castle.

It was no doubt about his old advantages being restored to him that kept George Geith in Fen Court. It was just this, he liked business better than preaching or praying, or visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction; and, accordingly, without arguing out the matter, or giving it more than the most casual consideration, he decided on remaining an accountant. And if a clergyman's engagement with the Church be dissoluble, if it be but a matter of service and payment, of temporal expediency and earthly reward, he was right. But, on the other hand, if entering the Church be marrying for time and eternity, if the vows vowed are irrevocable, if the choice, once made, whether hastily or after mature consideration, be one by which a man ought to abide through life, he was wrong. Anyhow, he remained in Fen Court, and that may suffice for us, for it is not with the tender scruples of a sensitive man we shall have to do in these volumes, not with the self-analysis of a subjective nature, but rather with the life's fight of one who now victorious, now defeated, struggled on till he reached the summit of his hopes, a disappointed man!

See him as he sits in his office, looking over his desk at the waving boughs and the rustling leaves that dance and are glad in the summer sunshine! Life is before him, and he is free.

He has lost years and years certainly, but at thirty-two a man has still the best part of his life to traverse, and he who can start from that point with nothing to hinder his making

a good thing of the remainder of the road, may truly be esteemed one of the favorites of fortune.

And this man? He has health, a clear conscience, a strong body, a vigorous mind.

He is willing to work, and has got work to do; he is succeeding in his profession; he can resume his old name. He can, if he pleases, seek out his relatives, and establish a connection between the City and one of the oldest and proudest families in Bedfordshire. Or, if he did not care to do that, he could at any rate walk about the world a free and independent man, dogged no more by the dread of discovery, and he could work with a light heart, knowing what he earned was his own, and would never again have to be laid aside and devoted to that purpose which had eaten seven years out of the very heart and glory of his life.

Now, come friend, come foe, George Geith was indifferent. The one enemy, who could have beggared and disgraced him, was lying at last in a churchyard, far away in Cornwall. After seven years—seven years that had altered every plan of his life, obliterated the prejudices of birth, taken him out of the Church, and flung him into the midst of a struggling, pushing world, to fight for his daily bread—George Geith was free.

Seven years! what would the next seven bring to him? For days the accountant asked himself that question; as he walked along the streets, as he ate his breakfast, and swallowed his dinner; he saw, not the crowds in the City thoroughfares, not his dingy back office, not the blank formality of Billiter Square, not the comfortless surroundings of the dirty chop-house; but estates, and houses, and happiness, all possessed by George Geith, who, with grave face and sober demeanor, saw visions and dreamed dreams!

What business man has not done this? Who, standing on the borders of that speculative land, which is so fair to all, and which holds gifts for so few, has not bought and sold, and sowed and reaped, and labored, and received abundantly?

Talk of the imagination of poets ; what are their wildest fancies in comparison to those which fill the brains of speculators ?

And this is the true fascination of business. Beyond its weary details, beyond its toils, beyond its certainties, beyond its endless necessities and countless annoyances, lies the limitless region of possibility, which is possessed in fancy by thousands who might seem to you, my reader, commonplace men enough.

That land is boundless, beautiful, happy. It is the El Dorado of struggling men, the heaven of inventors ; it is the sun which shines into dingy offices, which gilds dark clouds that would otherwise overwhelm with their blackness tired and anxious hearts.

Into this land the minds of silent and undemonstrative men pass the most readily. And it was because George Geith was to a great extent self-contained, and unconfiding, that he clothed the future with such glorious hues and radiant apparel.

And yet as this future had to be won with work, the glimpses he caught of it, instead of inducing idleness, only made him labor more determinedly in the present.

There was nothing in the prospect of rest which caused him to loathe his harness. At sight of the distant pastures, and the far-off streams, he merely quickened his pace onward.

Every step he took over the City stones, every letter he wrote, every piece of business he completed, brought the end closer, the journey nearer to a conclusion.

Freed from the danger of detection, George Geith once again made himself a bondsman.

Never a master lashed on a slave to labor as business now lashed on the accountant. It drove him, it hurried him, he lived in it and for it, far more than he lived by it.

He had worked so long fiercely, that his mind seemed cramped unless his body was always laboring a little beyond

its strength. The object for which he had toiled was gone, but it is easy to install a pleasant object in place of an unpleasant one ; and so for wealth, instead of for freedom, he began to labor, and soon every faculty was stretched, in the race he had set himself to run.

He had not a near relation living. Without wife, child, father or mother, sister or brother, he slaved for himself, as few men slave for their families. He made a god out of that which was sapping his health and strength ; and he fell down and worshipped it, day after day, and night after night, whilst the wind sobbed among the leaves of the trees, and the dead who, it might be, had some of them worshipped Mammon too, slept inside the rusty railings forgotten and forsaken.

So passed the autumn, and it was winter. The finest season of the year had departed, and George Geith was glad. The most profitable time was at hand — and the footsteps of clients, old and new, made pleasant music in the accountant's ear, as they ascended the stairs, leading to his second floor.

Bankrupts, men who were good enough, men who were doubtful, and men who were (speaking commercially) bad, had all alike occasion to seek the accountant's advice and assistance. Retailers, who kept clerks for their sold books, but not for their bought ; wholesale dealers who did not want to let their clerks see their books at all. Shrewd men of business, who yet could not balance a ledger ; ill-educated traders, who, though they could make money, would have been ashamed to show their ill-written and worse spelled journals to a stranger ; unhappy wretches shivering on the brink of insolvency ; creditors who did not think much of the cooking of some dishonest debtor's accounts — all these came and sat in George Geith's back office, and waited their turn to see him.

First come, first served, was the accountant's rule in business ; and one which I rather think contributed largely to

his success. One of the blood-royal would not in that office have taken precedence of John Oakes and Tom Styles ; and it is these latter gentlemen who, after all, are more profitable customers than the Upper Ten Thousand, if tradespeople could only think so.

Country gentry, indeed, who came to the City by rail, and West-End folks who made the City more crowded with their cabs, were somewhat disgusted at a regulation which failed to recognize their superiority over the East-End herd ; but never was any one more indignant than an individual who, having made a journey to town, solely on purpose to visit the office of Grant & Co., found himself left in the background, whilst common people were ushered into the presence chamber — vulgar people evidently in trade, whom the clerk would have hinted to any less stately customer, were a “ muslin, two teas, and a cheese.”

But this tall, portly country gentleman, who stood looking out at the drizzling rain which was wetting the pavement of Billiter Square, would not have understood what he meant, and would not have smiled at the description if he had ; and it was quite a relief to the clerk when he knew by the closing of the other office-door, that the stranger's turn had come at last.

“ Mr. Geith is at leisure now, sir,” said the youth, and he rose and opened the door of communication for the new client to pass through. Had the new client been of an observant nature he might have noticed that to the rest the clerk had merely nodded permission to enter ; but, wrapped up in his own affairs, he only remembered that others had obtained an audience before him, and so entering the inner office with the air of an injured man, opened the pleadings as follows.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE SYTHLOW MINES.

"I HAVE been kept waiting; I have been detained above an hour," he said, and from his manner of saying it, Mr. Geith saw waiting had not improved his temper.

"I am sorry," answered the accountant, "that it has so happened, but my rule is, that the first comer sees me first. We business men," he explained, "cannot afford to be other than democrats, and the peer and the peasant stand on an equality in a City office, if they bring work in their hands with them."

"I dare say your rule is a good one," was the reply, uttered in a tone which implied that the introduction of a general proposition, into a conversation with the speaker, was too presumptuous to be pleasing. "I dare say your rule is a good one, though it has occasioned inconvenience to myself. I came from Hertfordshire this morning in order to see Mr. Grant?"

"My name is Geith," said George, answering the implied question; "but it is all the same, I manage the business."

"But I wanted to see Mr. Grant," replied the visitor, looking all round the room as if in search of that mythical individual. "I wish to consult him on a matter of some importance and" —

"I assure you Mr. Grant is never here," interposed the accountant. "I am the managing partner in the firm, and



as such have the sole conduct of all affairs that may be intrusted to us. If you will tell me the nature of your business I shall be most happy to advise you to the best of my ability." And Mr. Geith, having first handed his visitor a chair, mounted his stool, and looked attentively at his new client, who in turn stared hard at him.

It was very little the accountant could discover from his scrutiny, beyond the fact of the new-comer being a gentleman, which fact he had ascertained the moment he entered the room.

A florid, middle-aged, blue-eyed, light-haired, hot-tempered individual, who looked like a country squire, but who might have been anything, from a nobleman to a small landed-proprietor. George could not conceive what his important business might be, so he waited till the other had completed his survey, and intimated that he felt comparatively satisfied with the appearance of the accountant by announcing himself to be "Mr. Molozane."

Mr. Geith had some vague recollection of having heard of an old and respectable county family of that name, and acknowledged the information with suitable respect.

"Having some money lying idle," proceeded Mr. Molozane, "I thought I would call and ask your opinion of the Sythlow Mines."

"Our business has no connection with mines," replied the accountant. "You would probably gain the information you require from a mining engineer."

"What do I want with mining engineers?" broke out Mr. Molozane. "What do I want with a parcel of fellows who would recommend anything for the sake of their commission? I require a disinterested opinion — an opinion on which I can depend."

"It would be impossible for me to offer one," said Mr. Geith; "for, in the first place, we are merely accountants, and, in the second, I never heard of the Sythlow Mines before."

"But you could ascertain particulars." •

"I doubt it," was the reply; "and even if I could, I should decline interfering in the matter. It is out of our line altogether."

"You have come in contact with mines, though," urged Mr. Molozane.

"With those who have been ruined by them, yes," returned Mr. Geith. He was sorry next minute for having spoken the words, for he saw the strong man wince at them — wince and shiver.

"Had you not better consult your solicitor?" he continued, becoming interested, in spite of himself, in his visitor.

"I have no solicitor in London, and I do not want my man of business in the country to know anything about the matter. The truth is," — and here Mr. Molozane left his chair and came and stood beside the accountant's desk, — "the truth is, I have taken shares in those cursed mines, and I have come to you to know whether they will bring ruin to me or not."

"Why to me?" asked George, in amazement.

"Because a sort of cousin of mine told me Grant & Co. were to be depended on. I dare say you remember him, — Mr. Croft, a clergyman."

George Geith did. He remembered the reverend gentleman getting himself into pecuniary trouble, and coming to that very office three or four times a day to see "how he stood." He remembered he had often wished Mr. Croft far enough, and he now began to marvel, whether Mr. Molozane would prove another such infliction. While this passed through his mind he said, —

"How can I possibly do what you wish? My business lies among certainties, not possibilities. I am no judge of mines. There is only one thing I do know, which is, that I should never invest one sixpence in them."

"Is a man liable to the extent of his shares?" was Mr. Molozane's comment on this speech.

“Certainly. And if the company be not on the cost principle he is liable to the extent of the company’s liabilities. Is yours on the cost principle?”

“I am sure I cannot tell,” said the dupe, faintly. “I know nothing about it, except that they told me I should never have to pay more than the first instalment unless I chose, and that I should be able at any time to sell at a hundred per. cent. profit.”

“How many shares have you?” asked the accountant.

“One hundred, fifty-pound shares,” was the reply.

“How much paid up?”

“Twenty pounds.”

“What are they selling at now?”

“Half-a-crown; a temporary depression in the market, they say, but I cannot help feeling uneasy.”

“Sell at half-a-crown,” said Mr. Geith, on receipt of this intelligence. “Sell at any price, and get rid of them.”

“Why five minutes ago, you stated you knew nothing of the Sythlow Mines; that you had never heard of them. I do not understand your meaning, sir, not at all;” and the poor gentleman, who felt the ground giving way under his feet, stood at bay.

“My meaning is this,” answered Mr. Geith, who could not feel offended at anything a man so placed might say; “that a company which induces the public to purchase shares by misrepresentation, and the fifty-pound shares in which are selling at half-a-crown, must be rotten, and the sooner you get clear of it the better.”

“But I should lose nineteen hundred and eighty-seven pounds,” said Mr. Molozane, with a readiness which proved he had gone through the calculation before; “and to think of the sum I expected to make — of all the plans I built on that d——d lead! I cannot give everything up, Mr. Geith — I cannot sell.”

For a moment the accountant paused and hesitated before he said: “As I understand, the case stands thus. You have

accepted an indefinite liability which you can get rid of at the cost of a definite loss ; were I so situated, I should submit to the loss, rather than continue the liability. You know to-day that nineteen hundred and eighty-seven pounds odd will be the extent of your misfortune, but you have no means of knowing what sum it will take to set you straight hereafter."

"You think, in fact, the mine might swallow up all I have?" asked Mr. Molozane, with a ghastly attempt at a smile.

"It is possible," answered the accountant, and his visitor resumed his chair.

"Could you ascertain what the mines are thought of in London?" said Mr. Molozane after a time, with that vague belief in the value and safety of metropolitan opinion, which is so distinguishing a peculiarity of country people.

"Probably I could," was the reply. "I will endeavor to do so to-morrow, and communicate the result."

"To-day, sir, — to-day, for God's sake!" urged his client; and thus exhorted, George Geith wrote on a slip of paper, —

"DEAR SIR, — Can you send me any information about the Sythlow Mines? Are they a safe investment; who is the secretary, and how does the company stand?"

"Yours, G. G."

This slip he told his clerk to take over to Mr. Bemmidge's office in Nicholas Lane, and wait an answer.

Having done this, he handed *The Times* to Mr. Molozane, and commenced writing letters that were to go out by that night's mail.

Whilst he was so engaged, people who had entered the outer office, and found no one there, knocked at the inner door for admittance. Then the accountant called out, "Come in," and laying down his pen, listened to what they had to say; or if the business proved of a private nature, went into the other office with them.

As a rule, he did not leave either friend or stranger alone in his own sanctum; but he felt no fear of Mr. Molozane scrutinizing his papers. The unfortunate shareholder evidently did not belong to that class of persons who cannot let a chance pass of examining into the state of other men's affairs, let their own anxiety be what it will.

Wearily the minutes passed to the visitor. He would have liked to lay down *The Times* and pace the room, but he feared disturbing Mr. Geith. The great silence of the place — that silence of London, which is so much more intense than silence in the country — wore him out.

Through the silence, the clock above the door ticked on relentlessly, and Mr. Molozane listened to the sound till it seemed as though his heart were ticking too, louder and faster than the clock.

When strangers entered he screened his face with the newspaper, and tried to help hearing what they said.

When they left he looked out of the window, near which he sat, at the blackened walls surrounding the old churchyard, and the trees which grew within the railings, and waved their branches mournfully to the dull sky, whilst the rain kept drip, dripping on to the damp graves beneath.

At last the clerk came back, stating, in explanation of his long absence, that Mr. Bemmidge, after reading the note, went out — telling him to wait. On his return he gave the messenger the fly-leaf of an old letter twisted up, with these words written in pencil on it —

“The Sythlow shares are not worth the value of the paper on which they are issued. Don't let any one you know invest in them. The company is not on the cost-book principle, and the secretary is Punt. I need say no more.”

“Why need he say ‘no more’?” asked Mr. Molozane, as the accountant concluded.

“Because there is not a greater scoundrel in London,” was the reply. “You must not lose an hour; you must sell whilst selling is possible.”

"Give me a glass of water," said Mr. Molozane, and Mr. Geith requested his clerk to bring some, which he did, in a jug; carrying it and a tumbler in on a waiter.

When he had emptied the jug, Mr. Molozane rose, and taking out his purse with a hand that would tremble spite of all his efforts at composure, said — "I do not know how much I am your debtor, but if you will" —

"You are not my debtor at all," interrupted the accountant; "mine are not our business, and I have done no business for you. I only wish I could have given you better news. Nay," he added, "I cannot make a charge. I might just as well take a fee for telling a stranger his way to St. Paul's."

"You are very good. I fear I have intruded most unwarrantably; I am sorry — I am greatly obliged;" and Mr. Molozane held out his hand in a manner which proved he was only paying Mr. Geith in civility because he declined payment in money.

There could be no doubt but that Mr. Molozane thought shaking hands with a man in business was conferring an honor on the individual so favored.

Many a person reading this thought would have resented the condescension, but the accountant pitied his visitor too much for that, and shook hands cordially.

"Your broker will be too late to sell to-day," he remarked, "but you might instruct him to dispose of the shares to-morrow."

"I do not know any broker," said Mr. Molozane, dolefully.

"Nor do I, personally," was the reply. "Smart and Stewart, in Broad Street, are considered very respectable people; you could scarcely do better than go to them."

"Thank you;" and Mr. Molozane was about to depart, when George asked him if he knew his way to Broad Street.

The misguided man of course did not, but meant to in-

quire, and expressed himself gratefully when the accountant told him "to turn to his right on getting out of Fen Court, and keep straight on to the end of Fenchurch Street. After that," proceeded Mr. Geith, "turn to your right again up Gracechurch Street, cross the first opportunity, and take the second turning to your left, which is Threadneedle Street; Broad Street is the first turning to your right going down Threadneedle Street."

All of which directions Mr. Molozane followed, and got safe into Broad Street; but there he lost himself and got into Austinfriars, where he floundered about for a while, and finally turned up in Great Winchester Street.

At that point some benevolent individual took him in charge, — conveyed him back to Broad Street *viâ* London Wall, and deposited him at the door of Messrs. Smart and Stewart's office.

"Want shares sold out of the Sythlow Mining Co.!" repeated Mr. Smart, who was a little old man with white hair, a sharp nose, and spectacles; "you are not singular, but it cannot be done. We could not get rid of them for you if we offered a premium for taking them. Very sorry to hear you have shares; a bad business — very;" and Mr. Smart, taking snuff, offered his box to Mr. Molozane.

It was a poor way, perhaps, of evincing sympathy, but he really intended the pinch as consolatory.

He was very sorry to hear that portly-looking country gentleman had shares in the undertaking, for he knew well enough that to the majority of those who were so unfortunate there was an end coming, which end was — ruin.

## CHAPTER V.

## A FRIENDLY INVITATION.

THE letters were written and posted; the clerk had taken down his great-coat, tied a white comforter in many folds round his neck, brushed his hat with his sleeve, and departed, shutting the outer door of the house after him, and George Geith was at last alone and free to linger a few minutes over his tea. From first thing in the morning he had been listening, talking, writing, or walking. He had not found leisure for any dinner, so he was breaking his fast with a chop the housekeeper had cooked for him, when a loud knock resounded through the house, and next moment Mr. Bemmidge entered the room.

"Don't let me interrupt you," he said, taking off his hat and unbuttoning his top-coat as he spoke. "What a night it is! The rain is coming down as if you were pouring it out of buckets. Thank you, I will take a cup of tea; shall I call Mrs. Grimsby?"

But Mrs. Grimsby, who knew Mr. Bemmidge's ways, was already in the room with a second cup and saucer, having placed which articles on the table, she waited for the tea-pot, and departed in triumph to replenish it.

"Bachelor's tea, Bemmidge," said Mr. Geith apologetically to his friend, who had by this time planted himself in front of the fire, with both feet on the fender.

"Always good," replied Mr. Bemmidge. "I think there ought to be an especial clause in the marriage-service, securing a strong cup to married men."



"One would think Mrs. Bemmidge treated you badly in that respect," remarked the accountant.

"So she does, but not worse than other wives treat their husbands; indeed, tea is the only thing we ever have a row about. It's strange, is n't it? Mothers can make tea, and sisters too, but wives can't; and yet one would think they must have been sisters once, and will some day be the mothers of great hulking boys. Ah! when I was single and in lodgings, used not I to make the tea black? It was like ink. Some fellows that came to see me then will talk about my tea yet. I had to ask them not to mention it before Mrs. B., for it set her back up regularly; and as she is as good a wife as ever breathed, it is a shame to vex her. What fires you do keep up, to be sure!" and Mr. Bemmidge thrust the poker between the bars as though the heat were not fierce enough already.

"And what about the mines?" he added.

"Do you mean was the information sufficient?" asked Mr. Geith. "If so, it was a little too sufficient for the person on whose behalf I made the inquiry; he had taken shares."

"Poor devil!" ejaculated Mr. Bemmidge; "he may put up his shutters."

"I don't think that he is in any business," said the accountant. "Has private means, I should imagine."

"If I were in his shoes, then, I should sell my sticks, pack up, and bolt," observed Mr. Bemmidge. "The Sythlow Mines will be the worst smash-up that we have seen for years. Mark my words if they are 'not. Do you know, I got quite in a fidget lest it was on your own behalf you were inquiring, and that my advice should not be strong enough to hinder your taking the shares as bargains. You ought to write to your client, and advise him to decamp."

"I do not know what the man is," answered the other, "or where he lives, or anything about him, except that I am sure he would not do as you suggest. He will either shoot himself or face the evil. He will not run away."

"Then, unless he is remarkably lucky, he will have to be content with a front seat in the work-house," said Mr. Bemmidge; and having sketched this pleasant future for Mr. Molozane, he swallowed another cup of tea, and pushed his chair a little farther from the fire.

"I have come to ask you to do me a favor," he began, after a pause. "No, not that," he added hastily, as Mr. Geith rose to get his check-book. "Not that, though you have helped me over many an ugly stile. I want you to eat your Christmas dinner with us. Everything plain — no formality — all old friends. A dance and a rubber. You are such an unsociable fellow that I scarcely liked to ask you, only that Mrs. B. would have it. In fact, she said, 'If you do not bring Mr. Grant, I must fetch him myself.'"

"Mrs. Bemmidge is extremely kind," said the accountant.

"Not a bit of it. We are all wanting to have you. Even my little girl is always asking when I am going to bring Mr. Rant home."

"What makes you call me Grant, Bemmidge?" asked the accountant as coolly as though he had never assumed the name.

"What makes me call you Grant?" repeated Mr. Bemmidge, turning his soft, womanish eyes on his friend in amazement. "What do you mean? What else should I call you?"

"Geith. I am not Grant, but the Co."

"And who is Grant?"

"My principal!" and Mr. Geith said this as soberly as a judge.

"The deuce he is; and why is he never here?"

"You might as well have asked me ten minutes since why you never saw the Co."

"I always thought the Co. a myth," was the frank reply.

"And, on the same principle, you think Grant a myth now, I suppose," suggested the accountant.

"No," said Mr. Bemmidge; "no, I don't; I believe in

Grant, and that he makes you work as if you had not another day to live. Have not I hit the mark now?"

"Pretty nearly; for years I have worked for Grant, but now, I may tell you in confidence, I am working for myself. I shall keep on the name of the firm, of course; but I am really my own master."

"That is right; that is as it should be. But now, look here, Geith, or whatever your name is, everybody calls you Grant, except this new clerk of yours, and I never could make out what the deuce he was saying."

"And everybody is welcome to call me Grant," retorted the accountant; "I can't stop to explain to all the people who come here that I am not Grant; and if I did, I should have them discontented at the idea of being attended to by a subordinate. I have tried it, and don't mean to trouble myself about the matter any more. Geith, or Grant, what is the difference? Cain or Abel, Jones or Thompson, it is all one to me."

"But in case of property being left to you?"

"Left to me!" scoffed George; "when did you ever hear of property being left to a man living in a back office, and who works like a dray-horse? But even so, I could prove my identity. And, if you come to that, Bemmidge, how many men in London are trading under their own names? How many men are known to their business acquaintances by the names their fathers bore before them? Junior partners, surviving partners, new beginners, all pass for other and more important people than they are. Take your own case, Bemmidge, who is your Co.? Is he a man of capital, or a mere dummy, who represents what you wish in your soul you possessed? Or is it Mrs. Bemmidge, or your little girl?"

"You hit me hard," answered the wine-merchant; "my Co. is but a graceful ending to a name that would look a little bald in advertising. Andrew Bemmidge and Company certainly sounds fuller than Andrew Bemmidge by itself; but then, I am Bemmidge, and you are not Grant."

“Very true; but what difference does that make? There is a firm you do business with, Rankin, Runcorn and Smith; what is the name of the partner you see?”

“Rankin, I believe.”

“You are wrong, then; there is but one man in the firm, and his name is Jackson. There is a perfumer in Bishopsgate called Hume, and he trades under the firm of Leopard and Holini. As you go down Mincing Lane, you must have noticed a great brass plate with Huggins, Son, Huggins and Holt, on it. For a long time I thought that genuine, but one day I discovered the sole representative of that house to be a Mr. Black, who lives down at Grays. He came into the business through being the son-in-law of Huggins’s son; but he does not think it expedient to change the name of the old firm, nor do I. It shall be Grant and Co. till the end of my tenancy, and those who like to call me Grant may do so.”

“But you want me to call you Geith” —

“When a man asks me to his house,” began George, “it changes the position. I could not accept your invitation if” —

“Then you will come. Thank you a hundred times; I shall make Mrs. Bemmidge’s heart happy, spite of the anxieties of impending plum-pudding. Thank you,” and Mr. Bemmidge wrung the accountant’s hand. “Let me see, what is your name? Just spell it for me, — there’s a good fellow.”

“I will give you a card,” said George, and he pulled one he had recently had engraved out of his purse. “What time do you dine — six o’clock?”

“Six! Lord bless me, no! Three, sharp; but come at two — come at one.”

“I could not do it,” was the answer; “it will be as much as I can manage to get up to your house at three o’clock. Service won’t be over, in any of the City churches, much before half-past one.”

"You don't mean to say you go to church, and that kind of thing, and you a bachelor, too."

"Have not bachelors souls?" asked Mr. Geith, with praiseworthy gravity.

"Yes, I suppose so; but it seems singular. One expects married people to be religious, and so forth. Indeed, I often say to Mrs. Bemmidge myself, that, when the children grow up, we must begin — we must, really. You have surprised me. I always thought that because you would not come up to us, that you had it out on Sundays."

"Had what out?" asked George, who was for once fairly mystified.

"Had your sleep. Unless I am going out of town, I never rise on Sundays till twelve or one; and I fancied you, perhaps, did not get up till three or four."

"That is making it a day of rest with a vengeance," remarked the accountant.

"What should I do if I did get up?" was the reply. "Really you have astonished me; you go to church even on Christmas-day. Mrs. Bemmidge's mother will be delighted. She is always scolding because we don't attend to those things as she does. You see it is entirely a matter of constitution," finished Mr. Bemmidge, and George Geith did not contradict the statement. He contented himself with shaking hands over again with his friend, assuring him he would be punctual, and remember the address.

Ivy Cottage, Holloway Road, "near the Archway Road," were Mr. Bemmidge's farewell words, ere he plunged out again into the pelting rain which came splashing down and making dreary puddles in the grave-yard.

For a minute George Geith's eyes followed him, then the accountant drew back into the house and closed the door, and ascended to his office thoughtfully.

"Now, I wonder what the deuce possessed me," he mumbled, as he stood before his fire; "I wonder what possessed me to say I would go. Have I not spent enough Christmas-

days alone to be able to face another?" and George Geith looked at the blaze that went leaping up the chimney, while he asked himself these questions. Seven times had the twenty-fifth of December come round since he left Morelands, and seven times had he passed the day with no other company save his own thoughts. In lodgings he had sat reading in solitary state while screams of laughter came ringing up the staircase, and the house shook with the dancing and the romping of his landlady's guests assembled in the first-floor front. He could still see the landlady, all "brass and glass," sailing into his room, — short, fat, and flounced, her hair covered with bugles and her hands with mittens, — to ask "if he would not come down just for half an hour to cheer him up a bit." A perfect recollection of her figure, clothed in a silk which had seen the grease of many a Christmas goose, to make no mention of a cotton-velvet jacket which covered irremediable rents in her bodice, came to the accountant's mind. He remembered the lace that trimmed the sleeves, the edging of her flounces, the marvellous frogs that sported up the front of her jacket. He could recall her smiling, self-satisfied face, and the tone, half compassionate half deprecating, while she preferred her request.

He followed her to the door disappointed at leaving. He was not lonely, and did not care for society, and he heard the rustle of her dress and the pit-patting of her feet as she trotted away down-stairs again and opened the drawing-room door through which a volley of laughter escaped, just as heated air rushes out through a ventilator.

He could remember that marvellous little pudding, about the size of a breakfast-cup, which was always sent up by the maid-of-all-work, with "missus's compliments, and hopes you won't be offended, sir, but she made it herself;" said maid-of-all-work being in a chronic state of grin, consequent on Christmas-boxes' excitement, and a new cap. He thought of dreary walks through wet streets — frosty streets — through the parks, across the bridges. He recollected going

to bed after a day that seemed to have been thirty-six hours long, and waking out of a long sleep to hear the laughing still vehement below, and the clinking of glasses on the landing. He remembered once flying from Christmas in London, packing a carpet-bag, relieving his landlady of his presence, and departing for Canterbury. When he put up at a second-rate hotel, in which, to his dismay, he found the landlady's son was lying dead up-stairs, as the waiter informed him at dinner, by way, doubtless, of improving his appetite. There were no Christmas festivities in that house to annoy him, but he found Christmas with mourning-plumes worse than Christmas with holly and mistletoe and riotous laughter, and so never tried the experiment again.

Christmas in offices was a degree better, certainly, than Christmas in lodgings, for he was delivered from plum-pudding, and he had the Christian satisfaction of doing good unto others by taking care of the premises whilst the house-keeper and her husband went to Kennington to eat their goose with Mrs. G.'s mamma. But still Christmas, even in his own castle, with silent rooms and a good fire, — his tea-things left ready, and a kettle on the hob, — was dreary work; and the accountant found, what most of us do find some time or other in our lives, that, though we may live without our kind for three hundred and sixty-four days out of the year, there comes one day when we want some friend to speak to, and wish us the compliments of the season.

For this reason George Geith, now that he was free, accepted Mr. Bemmidge's invitation. Of Mrs. B. he knew no more than that she economized her tea, and was, according to her husband's statement, the best wife that ever breathed. But he pictured her as rather a homely personage — a motherly, comfortable kind of woman, who might not perhaps be adapted to adorn any sphere, but who exactly suited the one in which Providence had placed her.

In this supposition, however, Mr. Geith was not quite correct, for Mrs. Bemmidge was neither motherly nor homely,

nor a particularly good wife ; on the contrary, she was rather one of those women whom London breeds by thousands, who emerge from back parlors in dingy city streets, from little suburban villas, and from third-rate boarding-schools, to make some honest man's life wretched, and to train up more girls to greater pretensions, greater snubbishness, and less usefulness, than their mothers.

A mean woman withal, and yet extravagant, who was always pinching and saving, spilling and spending, who looked after ounces of sugar, and grudged extra slices of bread, and still who dressed well, ate well, slept softly, and took care of Rot.

And this Rot was always sounding her own personal praises in her husband's ear. Who managed so well as she ? who had so nice-looking a drawing-room ? who looked after her servants so constantly ? who skirmished with the tradespeople more incessantly ? into whose house were greater bargains carried than into hers ?

If Mr. Bemmidge or anybody else could answer these questions, she, Mrs. B., would be obliged to them, but as no one ever attempted to contradict her, said debt of gratitude to society was never contracted by the lady who was determined to know Mr. Geith.

For Mr. Bemmidge had employed the words of course when he said his wife would be made happy by the accountant sharing their Christmas dinner. It was no *face de parler* to state that Mrs. Bemmidge had threatened to invade Fen Court herself. Mrs. Bemmidge had threatened and would have performed, only Mr. Geith's acceptance averted any such calamity. He was coming, for certain, added her husband, and therefore Mrs. Bemmidge began to set her house in order ; stuffed the fatted goose ; lived in her kitchen ; manufactured mince-pies ; mixed plum-pudding, and made herself as generally disagreeable as a fiery, managing, selfish, vulgar woman can.

Little did Mr. Geith think, as he drove up the Holloway



Road, of all the preparations which had been made in his honor ; of the torments Mrs. Bemmidge had passed through wondering what he liked best to eat and drink. Every imaginable diet, every obtainable beverage, was had in his honor ; and Mrs. Bemmidge herself, and Mr. B.'s mother and sister, were duly ready to receive the stranger.

As for Mr. Bemmidge, he was waiting for his friend in the highway ; and whenever Mr. Geith's cab came to a stand, the wine-merchant opened the door, wrung his visitor's hand, wished him a merry Christmas, hurried him through the little green gate, up the gravel walk, and into the house, where Mrs. Bemmidge met him, and saying, "This is kind," shook his hand with her own two ; one being quite insufficient to express her feelings of pleasure and satisfaction.

"I really thought Mr. Grant, Geith I mean, that we never were going to see you ;" and as she made this assertion, Mrs. Bemmidge took him out of the dark hall into the lighter drawing-room, where he was introduced to Mrs. Gilling, Miss Gilling, and Mr. Foss.

After the ceremony he was permitted to sit down and commence making himself agreeable.

Whilst he did so he looked at the ladies, and I should like you also, reader, to look at the feminine trio for a moment before proceeding with my story.

Shall we give the *pas* to Miss Gilling — a creature all nature, all curls, all enthusiasm, all frankness, who had a lily-white skin, and very black hair, very fine eyes, very small feet and hands, and a very passable figure.

Her age, you ask ? I really do not know it. What with her manner, her curls, her *naïveté*, and her delight at small atoms of pleasure, she might have passed for sweet seventeen ; but then Mrs. Bemmidge was three-and-thirty ; and intimate friends said there was not much more than five or six years between them.

Anyhow, there was Miss Gilling, let her age be what it would, for Mr. Geith to fall in love with, if he liked.

As for Mrs. Gilling, she was a widow of small property and with many wants; a lady who said she had kept a set of servants — whatever number that may be; who had once had things “very different,” and who was now very glad to drop in about supper-time three or four nights a week and partake of such hospitality as Mrs. Bemmidge extended to her; a dignified old lady, in a prodigious cap, who snubbed Andrew Bemmidge, and paid court to her daughter, and told everybody that “Sarah” was the best wife and mother in the world. “I am sure,” added Mrs. G., pathetically, “she makes a perfect slave of herself for her family.”

Slavery seemed to agree with Mrs. Bemmidge, who looked plump on her work. She was a woman of about the middle height, with dark-brown eyes, brown hair, a perfectly straight mouth, and a broad, fair forehead, with rather bustling manners, and a temper — I had better stop there, for George Geith saw only the face.

As for Mr. Foss, he seemed to be regarded as a perfect nonentity. A friend, Mrs. Bemmidge called him; and he certainly seemed to have all a friend’s undesirable privileges conceded to him. He rang the bell, he was hustled into corners, he was sent on errands, he played with the children, he was forgotten in the conversation, and made himself “quite at home,” sitting in a direct draught.

He was a distant relation of Andrew Bemmidge, and had all the wine-merchant’s natural modesty, sweetness of temper, and forgetfulness of himself.

Like the wine-merchant also, he could not see what was best for his domestic happiness, for he was over head and ears in love with Gertrude Gilling, and walked miles along the London pavements to fulfil her slightest behest.

“You found it cold, sir,” said Mrs. Gilling, in her usual manner, only with the chill off.

“On the contrary, very warm,” answered George; “but then, to be sure, I drove. I dare say the wind is cold to-day when walking. Have you been out?”

"Only to church," answered Mrs. Gilling, virtuously ; and the accountant, remembering what his friend had said on that head, let the subject drop.

"What a nice little place you have here, Bemmidge," he said ; "I should scarcely have supposed that near London there had been a house so much in the country."

"Nothing but fields at the back," replied Mr. Bemmidge, while the ladies mentally repeated the word "little," and marvelled at what size of houses Mr. Geith had been accustomed to visit. "Nothing but fields most part of the way to Hornsey ; pretty neighborhood ; beautiful villas about Highgate ; the cemetery is well worth seeing. You must come down often in the summer time and explore the country."

Whereupon Mrs. Bemmidge at once expressed a hope that now Mr. Geith had found his way out to Holloway, he would make no stranger of himself, but come often and "take them as they were" ; which could not be supposed to mean as they were then, seeing heaven and earth had been moved to put a good face on things in his honor.

George, in reply, stated his opinion that Mrs. Bemmidge was too kind, and Mrs. Bemmidge became duly satisfied that Mr. Geith was a delightful man.

That half-hour before dinner the accountant firmly believed never would end, — not because he was hungry and wished for dinner, but because he was wearied to death of trying to find something to say.

The children had, indeed, promised a temporary diversion when they came in duly brushed, washed, and combed, to make the lives of all on whom they cast their affections a weariness unto them. One little girl in especial, who had inquired pointedly, "Aint oo Mr. Rant?" seemed inclined to take him under her protection ; but Mr. Foss presented such attractions as the children tried vainly to resist : pockets filled with presents, — pockets that he let them turn inside out at their wish, will, and pleasure, — pockets from which halfpence might be abstracted and sweetmeats procured.

To be sure, Mrs. Bemmidge exhibited the little girl aforementioned in every possible light; called the ugly, pert imp her "pretty queen," retailed all her stupid, forward speeches, and kept the child in a grin at the repetition of her own wit.

"She said she was not to call you Mr. Rant any more, but Mr. Teeth," observed her mother. "Why did you call him Mr. Rant after all, dearie?"

In answer to which question Miss Bemmidge drew her shoulder completely out of her dress and rubbed herself sideways against her mother. A chum of a child the thing was, too, thicker round its waist than any other part of its body, and with the most astonishing pair of legs George Geith had ever beheld on a creature of its age.

"Just six last birthday," said Mrs. Bemmidge, with a triumphant smile, as though she seemed stating some fact greatly to the credit of her offspring.

"May I doo now, and 'peak to Harry, ma?" whispered the young lady, who could have spoken a great deal less like a two-year-old had she chosen; and mamma giving permission, she rushed over to Mr. Foss and claimed her share of the spoil.

"Oh! I declare you've been and given Tommy a sugar-plum more than me," shrieked mamma's queen, and forthwith Mr. Foss had to make up the deficit.

"And your'n are bigger than mine," said Tommy, with his tongue out, all of which by-play Mr. Geith affected not to hear.

"We have one younger than any of them," remarked Mr. Bemmidge, who was accustomed to the juvenile concert.

"Mamma, Mr. Geith has not seen baby."

"I am sure Mr. Geith does not want to see any more children until after dinner," answered Mrs. Bemmidge, which statement would have been perfectly true, had she only added that he did not want to see any more children at all; but politeness prevented Mr. Geith acquiescing in her

proposition, and so he declared that of all things he should like best to see the baby.

Straight away went the hostess to fetch her youngest-born; and during her absence George racked his brains what to say to Mrs. Gilling. The theatres, — Miss Gilling was so well up in them that his ignorance was exposed in a minute.

How the country looked at Christmas; how the old customs were still kept up in many a squire's house.

Mrs. Gilling knew nothing about the country; for her part she liked the gas and the shops; but Miss Gilling was enthusiastic concerning the snow on the tombstones, about frost on the evergreens, about the village choristers singing under the windows. Oh! better than anything on earth, Miss Gilling would like to spend a Christmas in a real old haunted house, where the olden pastimes were observed.

"Had Mr. Geith ever spent a Christmas in the country?" and every hair on Miss Gilling's head seemed to quiver as she asked the question.

"Yes," he answered, "I have spent several Christmas-days in the country."

"And in a baronial hall?" gasped Miss Gilling.

"In an old hall, at any rate," he replied laughing, "where Christmas was given every honor it deserves; and where we were all very happy because we were assembled together on the happiest day in the year."

"Oh! you will be contrasting that day with this," said Miss Gilling pathetically.

"Certainly not to the disadvantage of the present," was Mr. Geith's reply; at which Miss Gilling blushed and simpered, whilst her mother smiled with the chill more off than ever.

At this juncture, in came the baby; and it may not be out of place here to state, that, if there were one domestic animal for which, more than another, Mr. Geith entertained a settled abhorrence, it was a baby, — more particularly the

kind of baby which now made its appearance, — red in the face, blue in the arms, long in the legs, small in the eyes, and puckered about the mouth, — a baby which cried without tears, and kicked without reason, and was, so said its mamma, “the quietest little lamb that ever breathed.”

Long and weary had been George Geith's experiences of babies. Never any part of his clerical duty had been so irksome to him as the christenings. The funeral service was nothing to the baptismal. He would rather have had to do with half a dozen corpses than one baby. He did not know how to hold them, how to quiet them, what in the name of wonder to do with them. His rector used to be able to nurse a child as cleverly as a good cook can turn a pancake; but he never could learn the trick; and so sure as he had a christening, so certainly there was weeping and wailing beside the font, dissatisfaction amongst the mothers, and muttered remarks that it was plain to be seen he was a bachelor.

And now there was another autocrat for him to serve and honor; another mass of jelly, provided with lungs, for him to essay and touch.

“A fine fellow, is n't he?” said the father, who really believed the child was perfection.

“A darling, itzy ritzy pet,” capped mamma, handing the bundle of white cambric to Mr. Geith.

Now it did not cry, it just remained quiet long enough to get well into his arms, when it bent itself double backwards in order to get a good view of his face. Then its cheeks wrinkled, and with limbs drawn up, it screamed as though its last hour was come.

“Let mamma take it then, a darling. Shall mamma take it? Did n't it like strangers then? — there.” And Mrs. Bemmidge tried to pacify the wretch, and bore it off to its own especial apartment, whence George heard shrieks proceeding during the whole of dinner, which, much to his intense relief, was at last announced.

## CHAPTER VI.

## PLEASURE.

It was a nice little party, only six. Mr. Bemmidge took charge of his mother-in-law, Mr. Foss of Miss Gilling, and Mr. Geith of Mrs. Bemmidge. A nice little party,—at least it would have been a convenient number had the children not swarmed after the adults into the dining-room, where they mounted high chairs, and surveyed the table from a vantage-ground.

Mrs. Gilling was good enough to say grace; perhaps because her son-in-law would not. George Geith had never dined at any man's table since the days when that ceremony was usually performed by him; and somehow Mrs. Gilling's grace struck him as the funniest thing about her.

For the sake of his friend, for the genuine liking he bore for that simple-hearted honest man, who believed in his wife and his house, and who had not an atom of humbug in his composition, the accountant strove to enjoy himself and to eat and drink enough to satisfy his host.

But had he succeeded in his endeavor, he would certainly never have eaten and drank any more, for Mr. Bemmidge not merely wanted him to taste everything that was on the table, but also to take two or three helpings of each dish, like Mrs. Gilling, whose appetite, it was satisfactory to see, had not been impaired by trouble. Of course it was not civil of George to notice such matters, but being a man who noticed everything, he could not avoid seeing that Mrs. Gilling did justice to the good fare set before her.

She would trouble Andrew for sucking-pig, because it

was years since she had tasted one ; and, as it was Christmas, she positively must have a slice of turkey. Goose was a thing dear Sarah knew she could relish if she was dying, and roast beef — well, if Mr. Geith would be so kind ; it is an English dish, and it was as well to follow old customs. So the lady rambled about whilst the children ate stuffing and spilt gravy, and messed their pinafores, and their father employed his time in attentively scolding and giving them tidbits.

“I am so sorry, Mr. Geith, that we have nothing you like,” said Mrs. Bemmidge plaintively, after she had vainly pressed Mr. Geith to take a little more, “if it was only a morsel of beef.”

“Nothing I like !” repeated George. “I assure you, Mrs. Bemmidge, I have not eaten such a dinner for seven years.”

“Then I wonder you are alive,” remarked the lady, as she helped her mother to turkey again. “Tommy, do sit up ; Andrew, keep your fingers out of the gravy ; papa, do not let Amy have any more ; Harry, if you don’t behave yourself you shall not taste the pudding,” and so forth ; the courtesies of life being blended with a strict attention to its duties.

“What am I to do with it ?” thought George Geith, as he had about a pound of plum-pudding set before him, with an intimation from Mrs. Bemmidge that it was a triumph of her own culinary skill. And the accountant longed for the days of his youth when he had a knack of secreting pieces of fat, and other unsavory viands unknown by mortal man. “If I could but leave it ?” he sighed ; but no, there it was to be finished, and by him.

Mrs. Bemmidge would hear of no smaller portion ; and, indeed, in comparison to his, that allotted to Mrs. Gilling was as big as Benjamin’s.

“I am quite sure, Sarah, those children will make themselves ill,” said their grandmother, as Miss Bemmidge slyly *put forth her hand* to secure another mince-pie.



"You naughty girl, how dare you?" said mamma to her *queen*. "Papa, push her chair from the table. I suppose it is because Mr. Geith is here, she thinks she may do as she likes. Mr. Geith, have you found the ring? There is a ring in the pudding. I hope you may get it; I shall be so pleased."

"Perhaps, Mrs. Bemmidge, you have taken care I shall get it," answered George, with a ghastly attempt at a smile as he still worked his way through the mass before him.

"Oh, no! it was fairly mixed, I assure you," broke in Miss Gilling; "my sister dropped in the ring, and we all stirred the pudding after that. Even Andrew ventured into the kitchen to do his part," which was the less to be wondered at, perhaps, I may add, as Andrew had very often to venture into the kitchen in search of his boots.

"And supposing I do find the ring," said George, "what will be the consequence?"

"Why, you will be married before the year is out," answered Mrs. Bemmidge, with a simper.

"Then I shall certainly not continue the search," exclaimed the accountant, laying down his spoon.

"Oh! but that is not fair," cried Mrs. Bemmidge. "You must finish your pudding. And, besides, it is my guard-ring, and I cannot have it lost."

"I never willingly put myself in the way of misfortune," said Mr. Geith, solemnly.

"Only hear him," exclaimed Mrs. Gilling, with her mouth full of plums.

"I hope ring or no ring, you will be married by this time next year," said Mr. Bemmidge, "for a man never knows what true comfort and happiness is till he has a wife to take care of him."

"You speak from a fortunate experience," answered Mr. Geith. "If all marriages were as happy as yours"—and the hypocrite turned to Mrs. Bemmidge, and the young olive-branches round the table, who were by this time busy

with his plate, looking out "mamma's ring," and quarrelling for the candied lemon.

Suddenly there came a little scream from Miss Gilling — she had nearly swallowed the ring.

"Gerty's got it, Gerty's got it," cried parents and children in chorus.

"We may hope, then," said George, "to meet together again before next Christmas on a different occasion. That is," he added, "if I may be allowed the honor of being present."

But at this point Miss Gilling's confusion and blushes became so painful that Mrs. Bemmidge desired Amy to ring the bell. "If you *won't* have a mince-pie, Mr. Geith," she said, quite piteously.

"You really must excuse me," he replied. And then the servant came, and went through a ceremony that Mrs. Bemmidge called "clearing away"; after which Mrs. Gilling again officiated, and dessert was placed on the table.

"May I stay with papa and Mr. Teeth, mamma," asked Amy, when the ladies rose to depart.

"Yes, if you are good," said mamma; and Miss Bemmidge, and consequently the boys, remained.

Certainly, if the condition mentioned in her mother's speech had been enforced, the young lady would have been summarily expelled from the apartment. So long as the quartet could get Mr. Foss to supply them with fruit they remained preternaturally quiet; but when even Mr. Foss thought they had made sufficient inroads on the oranges and walnuts, Miss Bemmidge commenced to be dictatorial towards her brothers, and so aggravated Tommy that he pushed her off her chair, for which offence he was ejected from the delights of after-dinner chat, and sent in disgrace to his mother.

"You smoke, I know, Geith," said Mr. Bemmidge; and thereupon Amy rushed away for the cigar-case, procured matches, and made herself busy, getting a saucer to hold the *ashes*.

"That is my useful little girl," remarked Mr. Bemmidge. "I wonder if she could eat an orange." Whereupon Amy put her finger in her mouth, and looked as if she never had dexterously appropriated an orange in her life.

After that, she climbed on the knees of all the gentlemen in succession, and reversing the position of Mr. Foss's cigar when it lay on the table, had the inexpressible satisfaction of seeing him put the hot end in his mouth.

Shrieks of laughter from Andrew and Henry, however, exposed the culprit, and Miss Amy, together with her brothers, was shown the door by her father, who remarked apologetically to his cousin, that "children would be children."

Whether Mr. Foss found the aphorism cool his mouth, I cannot say; but it is certain he declined further smoking for that night.

It was all very well talking to Mr. Bemmidge and Mr. Foss when the children were away. Of course the conversation turned on business topics, but business was a topic George Geith liked.

The mysteries of the wine-trade were unveiled for the visitors' edification. The adulteration, tricks, the doctoring, were all duly discussed over — shall I write it reader? — brandy-and-water. Mr. Bemmidge talked about Messrs. Reuben and Issachar, "who had been exchequered for eighty thousand, and paid the fine," said Mr. Bemmidge, taking the cigar out of his mouth, "with a check. They were exchequered," he went on, "for filling barrels with water, and shipping them as brandy, in order to get the drawback. They managed by fitting a tin tube to the bung-hole, to enable the Custom-house officer to taste the very finest brandy. How much they made nobody ever knew," added Mr. Bemmidge, "nor how much they might have made, but for a row with one of their men, who informed against them."

Then there were Cripple, Holt and Sons, who ran their

spirit off through the streets, beside gas-pipes and water-pipes; through houses, stables, and warehouses, and only paid duty on about a third of the spirit they made.

Then there was Mr. Briggins, who sold thousands of pipes of wine, and yet still, who scarcely ever took a single pipe out of bond. "He made it all — heaven only knows how," said Mr. Bemmidge, regretfully; "and the secret died with him. I could not have told his wine from the best Portuguese; and, indeed, nobody could, if the wine would have kept. But it would not. It mildewed in a month. The firm sold it forty shillings a dozen, and twenty to the trade. And did n't the trade push it — only trust them!"

And so the talk went on till it was time to join the ladies, who were seated in the drawing-room, all domestic arrangements over, waiting for the evening guests, who arrived in due season, attired in dresses that were certainly very gay, determined to enjoy themselves and make Christmas-day a merry one indeed.

Can you picture the evening, my reader? The tea, handed round by awkward, yet gallant cavaliers, who upset the cups, tramped on the ladies' dresses, and made funny little speeches that kept the company in a roar. The card-tables, where whist was played for sixpenny stakes, and old ladies appropriated George Geith's earnings with an activity which it was cheering to remark in persons of their age.

The dancing, for which Mrs. Bemmidge played Sir Roger de Coverley, Hesty quadrilles, and Scotch reels.

The games, mistakes in which entailed forfeits, and forfeits involved a young gentleman seeking about for the prettiest girl in the room to kiss; a young lady standing in the corner and remarking —

Here I stand as stiff as a stake —

Who 'll come and kiss me for charity's sake?

Upon hearing which pathetic appeal a rush was usually made towards the spot she occupied. This one was to eat three inches off the poker, that to compose a verse of poetry, and

another to dance a minuet with the tongs. There was "Blind-man's-buff," in which game Miss Gilling caught Mr. Geith, and exclaiming, "I have got you at last, Mr. Jones," blushed becomingly when she discovered her mistake. "If it was a mistake," whispered Mrs. Jones, nudging her neighbor Mrs. Thomas.

And the singing after supper! The comic songs, at which George laughed as he had not laughed before since he was a boy, not because of any especial comicality in the songs, but because of the intense funniness of the singers. The sentimental ditties, emanating chiefly from the ladies, that were all pitched somewhere about F sharp, and went up into screams from thence. To say nothing of Mrs. Bemmidge, who, being too shy to favor the company, was yet overpowered by numbers, and induced at length to break forth with melody.

It was impossible she could sing, however, if people looked at her; so, to obviate this difficulty, she turned her chair round, and sat with her back to the table, in which position she delighted her guests with the account of a lady —

"Who left her home  
To fly with a Chris-ti-an knight."

When that was finished, her sister followed with "Love not," which performance Mr. Foss immediately capped with "Love on," — a song which was rapturously encored by all the young men and married ladies of the party.

After supper, more forfeits, more dancing, and louder and faster revelry, that reminded George Geith of the sounds that used to be borne to his ear when he kept solitary state in furnished apartments.

"Things went off capitally," Mrs. Bemmidge said to her mother when the door closed behind the last batch of departing guests, "and I am sure Mr. Geith enjoyed himself."

"If he did not, he ought to," remarked Mrs. Gilling, in a tone of the liveliest conviction; albeit her voice was a little thick.

Meantime George Geith was walking with a splitting headache through the deserted city streets.

“If that be pleasure,” he ungratefully soliloquized as he entered Fen Court, when the grave-yard looked ghastly in the gray morning light, — “if that be pleasured, give me work.”

## CHAPTER VII.

## A LITTLE COOL.

IF Miss Gilling had known what memories she was awakening when she talked so prettily about snow on the tombstones, and villagers singing Christmas hymns, it is more than probable she would have avoided the subject of Christmas altogether and contented herself with some remarks on the virtues of her sister's children, and the peculiar severity of those rheumatic attacks to which her mamma was subject in damp weather.

But all unconsciously she had raised a legion of old associations — associations so linked and interwoven with George Geith's best and happiest past, that, spite of all his efforts, he could not rest content till — now that he was free to go where and when he listed — he had revisited Morelands, and seen the friends that dwelt there.

The more he thought about Morelands, the greater grew his longing to see the old place once again. He contrasted Morelands with Holloway — Cissy Hayles with Gertrude Gilling — till he felt he must see the Hayles and the Chiltern Hills once more.

A sickening desire to get away from streets and houses; from business acquaintances and the treadmill of his daily life, came suddenly over the man; and though he could ill spare a day at that season of the year, he still determined to take a run into the country and see if it had changed as he had changed, or whether it would still bear the same face for him that it had done in days departed.

He could go by rail to Dunstable, and walk from thence over the downs to Morelands. Mr. and Mrs. Hayles, he used to say, were like his parents; the girls as thoughtful and kind as sisters; whilst, as for Cissy, of course that pretty creature, with her winning ways and many accomplishments, could be Cissy Hayles no longer, but must have been transformed into the wife of some rich man who made her happy. George Geith hoped —

And at this point he sighed. Cissy had certainly been very fond of him, poor girl; and if he had chanced to be differently situated, who knew? He might never have left Morelands, but remained there, and married Cissy himself. As it was, so it was, and, no doubt, all for the best. He was an accountant, and Cissy, most probably, a happy wife. At any rate, he trusted he should hear she was when he paid his visit to the ivy-covered rectory, which he had once been as free to enter as though it had been his own home.

Having thought over all which topics, George Geith told his clerk, one morning early in the new year, that he should not return before night, and started off on his expedition, looking twice as old as the curate who had fled from the easy country life more than seven years before.

It was nearly eight years, in point of fact, though, as he travelled the well-known paths, he found it hard to realize that so long a period had elapsed.

Time in London flies. Day hurries after day; spring, summer, autumn, winter come and go — come and go with a rapidity frightful to think of. The hours may appear long, because of the monotony of the work that fills them; but the week always seems, in looking back upon it, like half a one; and Sunday, in the city, falls about where Wednesday or Thursday might, far away in the country.

It is express pace there, year after year; we travel the miles of our threescore-and-ten pilgrimage, but they seem short because of the speed at which we go. And if we want to feel that our days are not flitting away so fast that we



cannot count their flight, we must go into the country where time travels by slow stages, and the ordinary space of human life lengthens its apparent duration to about a hundred and fifty years.

Eighteen months in Morelands — eight years in London ! Looking back, it seemed to George that he had resided for eighteen years in Morelands, and eight months in London.

There was nothing, either, in the aspect of the country by which he was surrounded, to assist him in realizing the length of time that had elapsed since he walked across those fields before. To his left, the Downs stretched away green and monotonous as ever ; to his right, the arable and pasture land was divided into about the same proportions as formerly.

Here and there a church-tower, a few trees, a little cluster of houses, reminded him of the situation of this or that village ; but there were no new houses, no modern mansions, no strange factories, nothing but what he had been familiar with years previously.

Above all, there was no town, and, looking about him and remarking this, George Geith thanked God there was country enough left to last him his lifetime.

It was still early in the day, and, as he did not wish to reach the rectory before two o'clock, he diverged a little from the path, and striking into a by-road — one of those unfenced, unbridged roads which are peculiar to that part of Bedfordshire — he walked on and on, till he gained the top of the hill.

Once there, he looked about him for a seat, and taking possession of a large stone lying by the wayside, he repeated his previous thanksgiving.

Miles without houses ; far as he could see without a town ! He was very happy to be alone with nature for a while, — to be out of the roar and bustle of London even for a few hours.

He took off his hat and let the north wind blow about his

head. He sat there with hands clasped before him, perfectly still and very happy. For years he had never felt so happy before; the great silence around seemed to lay a soothing touch on his heart, the great expanse of country filled and satisfied his soul.

All at once years and years seemed to be struck off his life, and he was young again. At the moment he understood the physical enjoyment some people feel in the mere sensation of living without having any specific object to live for, which had often before puzzled him.

Seated on the top of the hill, with the wind blowing crisp and cool on his temples, George Geith felt that "to be" utterly independent of "to have" was an unspeakable boon and blessing.

It was well to have toiled and worked, and been a prisoner, if but to feel this satisfaction and happiness.

It was worth being buried up in a town in order to understand the majesty and beauty of God's handiwork.

Wheresoever they would he let his eyes roam, — now into the valley he had just left, and again over country lying on the other side of the hill where he sat.

He followed the distant trains as the engines went puffing along their respective lines; he skirted the Chiltern Hills till he descried the distant woods of Snareham Castle.

Far below him were churches with little hamlets gathered around them, and each church he saw had a tower and a flat roof like that at Great Snareham, which, though he had relinquished the living, still belonged to his family.

By degrees he looked less at the other points of the landscape and more at the Snareham woods.

They lay miles and miles from him on the hillside, but still he could see them standing dark and bare against the wintry sky.

Was Lady Geith at the Castle, he marvelled? was Mark married? was his uncle Arthur living? What change had the years brought to them? "Mark must be eight-and-twenty now," he reflected. "How the time has flown!"

It had flown even whilst he remained sitting there, and he was about to turn his face down the hill again, when he saw mounting its crest, and then coming tearing along the tableland at top, a great black horse, which flung out its feet at the rate of twelve miles an hour, and dragged a well-appointed dog-cart, containing a gentleman and his groom, as easily as though the whole turn-out did not weigh half a hundred.

Idly as holiday-makers always look upon fresh incidents of any kind, George Geith watched the carriage come spinning on.

"A good whip and a good horse," he thought, and that instant he cried out to the former, "The tug is loose."

"What do you say," asked the driver, pulling up so suddenly that he almost brought the horse on his haunches.

"One of the tugs is loose," repeated George, and he got up to buckle it, — an attention which the horse resented by rising on his hind legs.

"Don't touch him; stand clear, will you; damn it, are you tired of your life?" thundered the owner, but George held his ground and brought the animal down again.

"Be quiet, you brute," he said, keeping a grip on the bridle with one hand while he vainly tried to fasten the tug with the other; but in the mean time the servant came to the rescue, and looking at his livery, George saw he had the Geith crest on his buttons. From the man he turned to the master, and beheld the master was his cousin Mark.

"You are a cool hand," remarked that gentleman, with a certain admiration; "you must be devilishly well accustomed to horses."

"It is many a year since I had anything to do with them," was the reply, and the two men stared at each other for a moment. Then, "Mark, don't you know me?"

"By Jove! it's George," burst from them simultaneously, and the pair grasped hands.

"What were you doing here?" asked the baronet.

"Resting myself," answered the accountant.

"Where are you bound for?"

"Morelands; I have a couple of hours to spare, and want to see the Hayles."

"Now, that is odd," cried Sir Mark; "I have just left the rectory. I will drive you back, — jump in!" And without more ado the young man turned his horse's head round in the direction of Morelands.

"Now, don't do that," pleaded George; "I should like the walk, and I shall not give you the trouble."

"Hang the trouble!" said Sir Mark; "jump in;" and thus exhorted, his cousin obeyed, the man sprang on behind, and away they went down the hill and across the valley at a pace which brought them to the rectory gates in less than twenty minutes.

"This will be a surprise," exclaimed Sir Mark, as they flew round the drive. "*Entre nous*, do you think Paterfamilias will be glad to see you?"

"I do not know why he should not," answered the accountant; "do you?"

"No," was the reply, "but I opine that absence has not made his heart grow fonder, so don't be disappointed. Forewarned, you know," finished Sir Mark, as he preceded his cousin through the open door and walked across the hall with a freedom, not to say familiarity, which astonished the *ci-devant* curate not a little.

"I found an old friend of yours on the hills, and brought him to see you, Mrs. Hayles," said the baronet, as he entered the room where Mrs. Hayles and her daughters were engaged in such light occupation as befitted the room in the house. "You do not seem to remember him; allow me to introduce my cousin, the Rev. George Geith."

As a hen ruffles up her plumage and backs into the nearest corner when any enemy approaches her brood, so Mrs. Hayles, at sight of the unclerical figure thus presented, shook out her maternal feathers and prepared to do battle in *behalf of the innocent children* surrounding her.

She was awkwardly placed, — between the Scylla of Sir Mark, whom she did not wish to offend, on the one hand, and the Charybdis of George, whom she did not wish to encourage, on the other.

But Mrs. Hayles was equal to the occasion : she froze her visitor by civility. She iced the waters of her conversation, and then gave him nice-looking, yet chilly fragments for his refreshment.

“ So glad to see him ; so good of him to call ; where had he been hiding himself ? Sophy, run and tell papa Mr. Geith has called to see him.”

Meantime the young ladies were iced likewise, only without their mamma’s civility. All except Cissy, who was Miss Hayles still, and who came forward with the old sweet smile, and the old charm of manner, to tell Mr. Geith how delighted she was his cousin had brought him to see them. “ But surely,” she added, “ you would have come of yourself if within twenty miles of us ? ” and the soft blue eyes were raised to his for a moment as the beauty spoke.

“ Come ! of course he would,” said Mrs. Hayles, with a slight frown directed towards her daughter, which did not escape the visitor’s notice. “ And where have you been all this time, Mr. Geith ; and are we to congratulate you on an excellent living ? ”

“ If you will be so kind,” answered the accountant, “ I have fallen into an excellent living — out of the Church.”

“ Do you mean ” — inquired the lady.

“ That I have relinquished the Church ? Yes. I am in business in London.”

“ You are not serious ? ” Mrs. Hayles was very much in earnest as she asked the question.

“ I am indeed,” was the reply ; “ I have been in business ever since I left Morelands.”

“ How sorry Mr. Hayles will be,” opined his wife. “ Such a pity such talents, such advantages, such an opening ! ” and Mrs. Hayles complacently folded her white hands and sighed.

"But if Mr. Geith be doing well, mamma," interposed Cissy.

"My love, I am surprised at you," said mamma, "for a man who has once entered the Church to relinquish her service so lightly" —

"I assure you," interrupted George, "I was driven from the Church by a stern necessity. I did not quit her service voluntarily, but having left it, I should neither be able nor wishful to reënter my old sphere of labor."

"The Snareham patriarch is still alive," here broke in Sir Mark, "and the living is yours, George, remember, whenever he goes. It belongs to nobody else, so long as you like to take it."

"But Mr. Geith could not take it now," said Mrs. Hayles, very softly. "Surely, if it be impossible for a layman to serve both God and Mammon, it would be something more than impossible for a clergyman to do so — and soiled as Mr. Geith's cloth is with contact with the world" —

"Contact with nonsense," retorted Sir Mark, — "that is, Mrs. Hayles; I did not mean it; I really am very sorry. I beg your pardon, I thought I was talking to George. What I meant to say was this, George is not soiled. He won't serve God and Mammon; he will only take Snareham and stick to it till something better offers. He will make as good a parson now as ever, and preach as good a sermon, and I can only repeat that Great Snareham is very heartily at his service; and I am very glad to have an opportunity of telling him so."

"Thank you, Mark," answered his cousin, "but it might be. I have eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and can never more return to a state of innocence, believing a curate's life to be a desirable one, and four hundred a year a mine of wealth wherewith to be content. I am very much obliged for your great kindness, but I shall not ask you for Great Snareham, for I cannot reënter the Church."

"How grieved Mr. Hayles will be," reiterated Mrs. Hayles.

"I hope he will not grieve on my account," said George, smiling in spite of himself; "for I am doing very well indeed, and no one ought to know better than Mr. Hayles, that every man who leaves the Church, throws an extra chance in the way of those who remain."

At which remark, Sir Mark, seizing a convenient opportunity, winked at his cousin.

It was not, perhaps, gentlemanly, but it conveyed to George the correct impressions that Sir Mark knew the lady wanted to have the living offered Swanham for her husband, and that, ironically, he hoped she might get it.

"I shall keep the living for you, George," said the baronet determinedly. "And if you do not like it when it falls in, I shall give it to some one to nurse till you change your mind."

"You have not lunched, Mr. Geith, I am sure," exclaimed Mrs. Hayles, who had heard enough of Great Snareham, and was desirous of shifting her ground. "Maud, ring the bell. Cissy, see what Sophy is doing, and whether she can find your papa."

"Let me go," said that easy friend of the family, Sir Mark Geith; and though Mrs. Hayles declared she could not think of troubling him, he was so kind as to accompany Cissy on her rambles, whether with the intention of finding papa, or having a moment's *tête-à-tête*, George did not know, and did not much care, for everything in the old rectory was changed for him, and the people who lived there were his friends, his dear familiar friends, no more.

Meantime Maud stood with her hand on the bell-rope, a fair white hand, which the accountant noticed, as he assured her mamma that he had lunched, — "that he had only a few minutes longer to stay."

"We dine at five, Mr. Geith, and we really can't let you run away in this manner, after so long an absence."

"You are very kind, but I must get back to town."

"Well, a glass of wine at any rate."

Here Maud made a feint of grasping the rope, and George Geith watched her pantomime of bell-ringing with some interest.

How well he remembered Maud, as a child, with her broad-brimmed straw hat, with her streaming curls, and her quiet decorous manners. A child who was almost too shy to say "thank you" freely to a stranger, and who had yet developed into this calm self-possessed young lady, whom George looked at till he wondered.

"I never take wine in the middle of the day," he said, even whilst he was marvelling at the changes a few years had wrought.

"Mr. Hayles will scold me, I know," said the lady in a tone of deep distress, for she was beginning to think she had iced her manner too much, and that George saw through her a little too well. "Maud, ring the bell; we will have lunch brought up at any rate." And Maud did ring, for she saw her mother was at least in earnest.

"I beg," entreated the visitor, "that you will not order any lunch for me. I really must get back to the station at once. I had but a short time to spare, but being in the neighborhood I thought I could not pass your door."

"It was so kind — so like you. Oh! here is Mr. Hayles."

And the rector's lady breathed a sigh of relief as her husband, accompanied by Sophy, and Cissy, and Sir Mark, entered the apartment.

Mr. Hayles was a gray-haired man, who seemed oppressed by the size of his family, the ever increasing gentility of his wife, and the smallness of his income; but he was more honest than Mrs. Hayles, inasmuch as, that while he shook hands with his old curate heartily, and hoped he was well and doing well, he still did not express any pleasure at his visit, nor request him to prolong it.

As, however, "using hospitality without grudging," to all



men, had always been one of the rector's sins most grievous in his wife's eyes, he did urge Mr. Geith to have something to eat before he departed; and in this he was seconded by Cissy, who, spite of the thunder-storm gathering on the maternal brow, prayed him to stop for another half-hour at any rate. "It was so long since they had seen him — such years and years!"

She looked very pretty as she begged him to stay. She was the same winning, stealing, twining Cissy, George Geith remembered walking with through the rectory gardens in the old days departed, when such close intimacy was dangerous and trying to both.

But he was not to be taken in with blue eyes and soft words and sunshiny smiles now. He had seen her smile on Mark in just the same manner, and he knew her at least for what she was — a natural woman it might be, but still a woman naturally a flirt.

"It is all grist that comes to the mill," thought George, "and I won't be ground up in it;" which was a very prudent resolve, more especially as — God bless her — Cissy Hayles had loved, and did love, George Geith more than she was ever likely to love any man again.

More, most certainly, than she ever could care for Sir Mark, who had few brains, few talents, and indulged in profane swearing to an extent which scandalized the rector.

She had tried hard to win him; she was trying harder to keep him; for a baronet and the great Geith estates and good marriage settlement were things to be desired by a poor parson's daughter.

"It will be rest for your father, the making of your sister, and position for yourself." This was how Mrs. Hayles looked on the willing horse whenever it faltered for a moment.

The match would, probably, accomplish all Mrs. Hayles said, and Cissy did her best to bring it about; but for all that, she could not help liking the one cousin better than the

other, and when George thought she was acting, she was as much in earnest as ever she was in her life.

Having the baronet in tow, she would not have married the accountant, even had he been a clergyman again, and the rector of Great Snareham to boot; but in any capacity she would have flirted with him, and for this reason it was fortunate that Mr. Geith fortified himself against her artillery.

It may have been alone for this reason that Mr. Hayles asked his visitor to spare him a few moments before he left.

When in his study the rector shut the door and said, "More than seven years ago, Mr. Geith, when you left Morelands and the Church together, you told me a painful reason was driving you from both. Within six months after I knew what that reason was."

It took a great deal to move George Geith's composure, but his face changed as Mr. Hayles spoke.

"I do not pretend to judge you," the clergyman went on speaking, evidently with an effort. "I do not say how far you were sinned against, how far you erred yourself. I only know I am sorry for you now, as I was sorry for you then.

"But — you came to this house under false colors; you were received by us as we never could have received you had we known your true position. Was it right for you to deceive her, Mr. Geith? I only ask you, was it right?"

"It was not," George answered, "but I meant no harm. If I had thought my silence could do harm to you or yours, I should have gone away long before I did."

"You mixed familiarly with our girls," continued the rector, "you who could never have married one of them. I do not want to say more; will you finish my sentence for yourself?"

"Yes," George Geith answered, "I will. You want to know why, as I ought never to have entered your house in the past, I have come to it in the present; and I repeat I meant no harm to any one. I came remembering all your former kindness to me, and wishful to prove I am not un-

grateful for it. But I will come no more. That is what you want me to promise, Mr. Hayles; and I give you my word this is the last time I will ever cross your threshold, unless you tell me I can benefit you or yours in some way by doing so. Now let me ask you one question. Does Mrs. Hayles, or my cousin Mark, know why I left here?"

"I forgive you the doubt," answered the rector, "for I know how it has arisen. I never told your trouble to any one, and I never shall. I did say to my wife, I regretted we had suffered such close intimacy with the girls, as I feared you were by no means a desirable acquaintance for them. You could not blame me for the precaution, because I did not know when or where, or how they and you might meet again."

There was a moment's silence, and then George Geith held out his hand in farewell.

Never a man had the rector liked so well since they parted; and as he looked in the worn face, at the brown hair sprinkled with gray, at the eyes sunken with want of rest and incessant mental labor, his heart smote him for the words he had spoken, and his voice shook a little while he begged his visitor not to think he had been over-hard.

"Now, Mr. Hayles, I can never think anything but good of you," answered George, uttering a secret malediction at the same time against the rector's wife.

"And are you doing well? Can I assist you in any way? If I can, let me know. There is nothing I would not do for you, except ask you here; and that I could not, you know."

There was something very touching in the way the old clergyman said this.

Remembering all things, his visitor marvelled he was so lenient, and for a minute felt tempted to tell him he was working for freedom no longer.

But he put aside the impulse, and merely promising to apply to Mr. Hayles should he ever stand in need of his assistance, wrung the hand extended to him, and left the room.

Whilst he was saying good-bye to Mrs. Hayles and her daughters, the rector stood on the door-step, waiting to see the last of the man he once hoped to have called his son.

Sir Mark and Mr. Geith came out together.

“If you will not go to Snareham, let me at least drop you at the station.” The former was entreating, and as nothing could be urged against this proposition, George took his place in the dog-cart, while the baronet lifted the reins.

Then once again Mr. Hayles held out his hand — coming quite close to the wheel, so that his old curate might reach it. “Good-bye — God bless you,” he said, but before any answer could be returned, the black fiend was off; and as they swept round the drive, the high laurels and thick shrubs shut out the sight of Moreland Rectory from George Geith’s eyes forever!

## CHAPTER VIII.

## ALL ON ONE SIDE.

"TAKE the reins for a minute, will you?" said Sir Mark to his cousin, when they were once more on the open road. I want a cigar. I sha'n't offer you one, old fellow," he went on as he opened his case, "because I know you have tasted nothing since you left London. All your fibs to mother Hayles did not impose on me. Queer old girl, is n't she?"

"I think she is greatly changed, and not improved," answered George.

"Changed! not a bit of it," said the baronet, scornfully. "People don't change, they only develop; and the old lady is so cock-a-hoop about marrying one of her girls to a baronet, that she does not know what to do with herself.

"Should you like to drive? If you would, go ahead."

"Thank you, I had much rather you managed your brute for yourself. He has nearly pulled my arms off as it is."

"A trifle hard in the mouth, perhaps," said Sir Mark, as he resumed the reins; "but his only fault."

"I should not have thought it," answered the accountant, dryly; "for I have seen him rear, shy, and plunge, and I observe he requires a tidy kicking-strap in addition."

"He'll take me to Farnham though, within the hour," answered the other.

"He won't take me that far, Mark," was the reply; "for I must get back to London."

"So you shall, my boy; but come and dine with me first. Then, if you won't stay longer, you shall catch the up ex-

press at the junction. There is nobody at the castle but myself. My mother and the old cat are in town, and have been there for the last three months ; now, don't refuse ; I am bored to death, and have lots to tell you. Besides, the drive will do you good. Do you not feel as if the wind were blowing life into you ?”

“ Yes,” answered George. “ It is almost life to a man who has scarcely set foot out of London all these years.”

And he looked round him as he spoke. What a difference between the two lots ; between that of the possible heir, and that of the certain possessor.

Driving a horse which knew but one pace, racing as hard as he could tear along the clear country road, might not seem an occupation to desire, nor the animal's owner a person to envy ; but the leisure and the wealth which left it free to the one man to go where he liked, when he liked, as he liked, seemed for the moment amazing to the other, who had been working on the business treadmill for years.

Just then pleasure seemed a very pleasant thing to the busy man. He had never known what it was to be idle all his days. He had been reading, learning, studying, preaching, visiting, and afterwards poring over ledgers and balance-sheets since boyhood till then ; and with that keen relish which fasting from any indulgence induces, he devoured the sensational delight of the present, and fancied all moments must be as sweet to his cousin as that to him.

And indeed Sir Mark Geith was apparently fortunate enough, young enough, and happy enough to be regarded with something like envy.

Just twenty-eight, in the prime of health and strength, with high animal spirits, and every capacity for taking enjoyment out of his surroundings, the baronet was driving home to Snareham Castle, possessed of a fine estate and a good rent-roll wherewith to keep up the dignity of an old and honored name.

There were no skeletons in his cupboard, unless indeed it

might be the old cat so spitefully referred to by him. He was free from all ties; the world lay before him as it lay before George, but it was a very different world through which he had to travel.

Looking down at the woods which surrounded Mark's home, and contrasting the free hillside, and the breezy downs, and the pure, fresh air which he drank in as a fainting man might wine, with Fen Court and its church-yard, and its never-ending, always commencing round of work, George Geith felt that his cousin was a person to be envied, and that he should like to be standing in his shoes.

But next moment he put aside the thought. Should he to whom God had given the capacity for work, repine because God had not permitted him to remain idle? Should he who could win wealth, and be proud of winning it with the strength of his own arm, lament because a good life stood between him and this unearned hoard? Should he be disloyal to the man who was pressing hospitality on him, and who had been so like his brother in days gone by, that at Snareham Castle strangers were at a loss to decide which was the prospective baronet, and which the country clergyman's landless son?

Spite of his weary struggles — ay, even because of them — he would be loyal to his cousin, true to himself; and with this better feeling there mingled another reason for his contentment. Over and above that strange sense of personal possession which a man feels in himself, and which makes him know he would rather lie down in the grave in his own flesh and blood than return to life and take another's form and soul instead, George Geith was conscious of a mental superiority over his cousin, which he would not have relinquished for ten times his cousin's wealth. Brains Mark had none; he had the usual amount of conventional ability with which most young men are gifted, — rather a greater amount indeed, because his speech was perfectly unaffected and natural; but he had no talents, no genius of any kind, and George Geith knew *this*.

If both men had started fairly together in the race, without any favor shown to either, Mark would never have reached the winning-post at all, while George was almost sure to do so.

Looking at his cousin, therefore, he felt somewhat as a prize-fighter might if contemplating an effeminate stripling in armor:—

“Were we stripped to the skin,” thinks the giant, “I would show you in two minutes which is the better man.”

Wealth and rank were Mark Geith’s armor; they are the breastplate and helmet which the world so often mistakes for strength.

Have you, reader, ever thought what it must be for a man to achieve a social success in his shirt-sleeves? with what brawny arms and muscles of iron he must have fought out his long fight. If business-men are sometimes over-proud of their achievements, it seems to me the aristocracy might be more lenient towards them for this reason, viz: that mind, and body, and spirit have been often weary with the conflict; that men and circumstances and prejudices were all against them, as they toiled onward to success.

Yet they have their balance; oftentimes, too, the sure support afforded by an inner consciousness of power.

The poodle yelping from the carriage-window is a genteeler animal than the unwashed, unkempt, half-starved mastiff stalking along the pavement; and yet still, if I mistake not the faces of dogs, the mastiff has a contempt for the poodle, and is marvelling how it would look wandering through the streets, wading through mire, and mud, and filth.

“Come down to our level, ye sorcerers,” shouts Business. “Come from chambers of pleasure, from couches of ease, from servants, equipages, and bankers’ balances to our level. Then we will fight it out till we see if you despise us still.”

And then, when Pleasure refuses the challenge, Business climbs desperately up the hill, on the summit whereof lie the fair lands where the idlers dwell, and, repeating its challenge, *is laughed to scorn.*



For in those fair lands it is wealth, and rank, and grace, and manners that carry the day; while down below it is something far different — something not to be acquired by art, or inherited from man, which shall win the palm, but strength, and energy, and patience, and prudence, and brains — all gifts direct from God, that bring a man safe through the fiercest war which civilization permits.

And should George Geith wish to change his pure gold for the gilding he beheld beautifying his cousin?

Scarcely, I think; though he was but dimly conscious of the extent of his own possessions. Scarcely, though he sighed when the woods surrounding Snareham Castle lay spread once more before him. No; he would not change his own identity, and he could not covet his cousin's goods. For all which reasons he was content being himself; to be still as far off him, down amongst the rabble, fighting for his life.

As some such thoughts were floating through George Geith's mind, Sir Mark pointed with his whip to the old tower of Great Snareham Church as he said, —

"I shall never give it to anybody but you while Mr. Hetton lives; and, if you like, I will appoint you private chaplain till he dies."

"You are very good, Mark," was the reply; "but I shall never preach again."

"I don't want you to preach, man," retorted his cousin.

"Heaven knows, I have listened to too many sermons from my mother and madam to wish to hear any more; but I do want you to wear a black coat and white cravat, and say grace for me at the castle. If you would only stay where I could lay my hand on you at any time, I would give you a couple or three hundred a-year for sitting in the chimney-corner."

"A chimney-corner life would never suit me," answered the accountant. "I have worked too long and too hard, since I saw you last, ever to rest content again with light employment and light pay. I never did a better thing for myself

than when I left the Church. I was not adapted for a clergyman, and I have now found out what I am fitted for."

"A pushing shopkeeper," suggested Sir Mark.

"I would rather be that than a dependant parson, kicking my heels at a great man's door," retorted his cousin.

"You need n't be so sharp about the matter, damn it," observed Sir Mark. "I did not mean to annoy you; and if you think it an insult to have a living pressed upon you, I know somebody who would jump at it. What fun it is to watch Mrs. Hayles nibbling after the piece of preferment. She watches Great Snareham as a cat might a larder-door."

"But will you not give it to her husband?" asked George.

"I tell you the living is yours," said the baronet, "and if it were not yours I should not give it to Mr. Hayles. He is a good man; but I have my reasons, and he shall never have Great Snareham while I have the giving of it. But now we are at the old place again; tell me if you think it improved?"

George looked about him. Through the trees that bordered the drive he could see belts of young planting stretching away in the distance. He perceived that the deer park, once so rough and neglected, was now kept smooth as a bowling green. That the steep grassy bank, under the castle-windows, was converted into terraces; and that below the terraces lay a pleasure-garden.

Within the court-yard, which he could remember grass-grown and comfortless, there was another garden, and the high, black walls were now covered with ivy and creepers, that took away the plain look from the enclosure.

There was a carriage-drive through the centre of this garden, terminating in a sweep before the great oaken doors of the castle. As Sir Mark pulled up, these doors opened, and George seeing the face of the butler, who was waiting to receive his master, exclaimed, —

"Why, that is Corby!"

"Yes," answered his cousin. "I think you will find all

your old friends inside, — at least I have parted with none of them. Bob died last winter. You remember Bob, who taught us both to ride. That is the only man who was here in my father's time who is not here now, and perhaps they won't be glad to see you. Corby, who do you think this is? Why, you don't mean to say you forget him? He knows you."

"I declare it's Master George," cried the old man, joyfully. "We have all asked about you so long since, we thought it was of no use asking any more." And then George went through the halls and corridors, shaking hands with one and another of the people, who had known him from the time he was a boy. It was a change from Fen Court certainly, where no voice ever welcomed his return to Snareham Castle, with the servants crowding about him, and hoping he was well and coming back to live near them.

If he had been the owner twenty times over they could not have seemed more glad to see him.

"If her ladyship was here now she would be pleased," remarked the housekeeper. "She has said to me times out of number she was sure you were gone to India, and that she would never see you again."

"I have not been to India," answered George, laughing, "though I have been in places my aunt would think stranger than that;" and having thus parried the housekeeper's question, he turned to Mark, whose face had fallen a little when the woman spoke of his mother.

For Lady Geith had always been fonder of George Geith than of her own son, and made no secret of her preference, and it was not singular that any allusion to her predilections proved painful to Sir Mark.

Nevertheless, being of a very generous nature, he bore no grudge to George, but welcomed his cousin as cordially to Snareham as though there had never been any cause for jealousy between them.

"He could not," so he told George after dinner, "forget

the old times when they were boys together, and he wanted some one of his own blood to talk to."

"I have no peace now at all," he added, as he pushed the wine towards his cousin; "my father is dead, and I believe my mother hates me; and my uncle Arthur is now very little better than an idiot, and his wife says I am not a Geith at all. And when I want to marry, that old devil, Mrs. Lemon, sets her face against Cissy, and makes my mother ten times worse than ever."

"We are not on terms now at all. Her ladyship and Mrs. Lemon live in Halkin Street, and I stay here."

"I do not understand how it is you and your mother cannot agree," remarked George.

"It is Mrs. Lemon," was the reply; "I believe that if the old hag were out of the country, we should get on well enough. But she is like an open blister, and I get so mad to think what a fool I have been, that it makes matters worse."

"How have you been a fool?" asked George.

"Oh, spending money, and being a devil of an idiot," was the reply. "I came into an unencumbered estate — that is, unencumbered except by myself — and instead of paying off the Jews, and making a clean breast of affairs to my solicitor, I must needs begin improving and spending, and making ducks and drakes of everything I had. And so the end of it all is, I can't marry without my mother's help, and she won't give it, not though I threatened to cut off the entail."

"You threatened to do what?" asked the next heir, and his face was not pleasant to look at.

"Cut off the entail," repeated Sir Mark, with some confusion; "of course I had not the slightest intention of doing anything of the kind, but I thought it worth while to try the effect."

"And what did your mother say?" asked his cousin, with not unnatural interest.

"Why, she cut up deuced dusty, dared me to do it, and

said, if I injured your prospects in any way, she would make me bitterly repent my imprudence. We had a devil of a row; and when I suggested that, as we had not heard anything of you for so long a time, it was likely as not you were dead, she broke out crying as if her heart would break. I declare, George," added Sir Mark, quite seriously, "I sometimes think there was some mistake, and that you are Lady Geith's son, not I."

"Considering how long an heir was looked for, and that I am four years your senior, the idea seems unlikely," answered his cousin.

"Anyhow," went on Sir Mark, "my mother and I have never stabled our horses together at all; and now, in a matter where my happiness is really involved, she won't hold out a finger to help me. She says she will not give a sixpence to free Snareham during her lifetime, and that at her death she intends leaving her fortune to you."

"I hope and trust she will do nothing of the kind," said George Geith, and he said so in good faith.

"She says she will, and I believe she intends to be as good as her word. I do not think she ought, you know," added Sir Mark; "I do not see why she should pass me by for you; but I would rather you had her money than Mrs. Lemon."

"Mrs. Lemon is more likely to have the bulk of it than either of us," remarked his cousin. "I wonder what my aunt can see in that woman to like: I always hated her."

"It was mutual," answered the baronet; "for she always hated you. But my mother does not like her, though she is influenced by what she says, and takes her word for gospel. I do not believe she likes her. I have often fancied lately there will be a split there some day; and if it ever does come to that, my mother and I will, I hope, be better friends."

"I trust you will," said George; "and now tell me, what is this objection to Miss Hayles?"

"Want of birth, want of money, want of everything,

according to Mrs. Lemon's statement. Absolutely, she says Cissy is not even pretty."

"You should not be surprised at that, remembering she is a woman," observed his cousin.

"Do you think jealousy makes them so blind?" asked Sir Mark.

"No; but I know jealousy makes them lie," said George.

"What a grave fellow you have got," observed Sir Mark; and there was silence for a minute.

Then, "How did you get to know the Hayles?" asked George. "I never recollect your being there in my time."

"I got to know them when I went over to Morelands to try and learn what had become of you," replied Sir Mark, "and since that time, whenever I have been in the country, I have always passed a good deal of time at the rectory; Cissy and I have been engaged now for nearly three years."

"With Mrs. Hayles's full approval, I suppose," remarked George.

"I believe you; the old lady accepted so well for her, that if I had not really and truly liked Cissy better than any girl I ever saw in my life, I should have cut Morelands long ago. As it is, I can't stand much of Mrs. Hayles. That is the reason I can't give Snareham to her husband, though she has set Cissy on to ask me for it many a time. Hang it, she ought to be content. A poor clergyman does not pick up a baronet for his son-in-law every day."

"What an unsophisticated creature you are," said George; "you don't know your own value at all."

"I know the value of my position, at any rate," retorted Sir Mark; "and you know as well as I do, too, that, pretty and winning and graceful as my darling is, she might have stayed unmarried at Morelands till she grew old and ugly, unless she had taken up with one of her father's curates, and gone home to darn his socks and make his shirts."

"Baronets were certainly not plentiful in the parish," rejoined his cousin.

"I have often wondered," went on Sir Mark, "how you escaped heart whole, you were so intimate with the Hayles, you were so much with Cissy."

"I had other things to think about," answered George, shortly; "if you had been compelled to work for your living, and thinking, like myself, how to work to better purposes, you would scarcely have had leisure to get into a mess with Miss Hayles."

"Perhaps so," replied Sir Mark, "and yet I am surprised. Your duties at Morelands could scarcely have kept you so constantly employed as all that comes to."

"It was how to get away from Morelands, and what to be at when I was away, that occupied my thoughts," said the accountant.

"And what the deuce made you want to get away?" asked his cousin.

"I wanted to better my condition," was the reply.

"Very likely; but it was not that took you off from Morelands like a flash of lightning, and prevented you writing to one of us all those years. Come now, George, I have been frank with you: make a clean breast to me in return. Why did you go?"

"That is my secret," said the accountant, — "one which I do not mean to confide even to you."

"What a confounded shame!" cried Sir Mark. "There is nothing I would n't tell you."

"Because at present you have nothing to say which you would not tell to anybody. When you are so rich as to own a secret, you will get a casket to lock it up, and not look in it too often yourself."

"Well, as far as I know myself, I would keep nothing back from you," said the baronet.

"Which shows how very little you do know of yourself," answered his cousin. "But at any rate, Mark, I cannot tell you the whole of my reasons for leaving Morelands and the Church. They were sufficient as I thought, and the step

has turned out well. Don't ask me any more about it, — there's a good fellow; but accept as a whole truth the half one, that I went away to better my condition."

"Only one question, George," began Sir Mark: "could money" — but the accountant, laying a hand on his arm, stopped him with —

"Do you forget what I told you once when we were both but lads, that I had promised my mother never to take any money or favor from Lady Geith or you, except the living your father intended for me. You know she never accepted help, and I know she often stood sorely in need of it; and though I may never now ascertain her reasons for requiring such a promise, I intend to keep my word faithfully."

"Now, don't say that," pleaded Sir Mark, "for I was going to ask you if an awful thing they call capital be not essential in business, and about to offer" —

"Dreadfully hard up though you are yourself, to find me money enough to make my fortune," finished George with a smile. "Thank you all the same, but it cannot be. Were I doing badly, I could not use your purse; and as I am doing well, I do not need it. And now I must bid you good-bye, if I mean to get to London to-night."

"We could not catch the express now possibly," said the baronet, "so make yourself happy for the night. I am quite serious," added Sir Mark, "and if you doubt it, there is Bradshaw, and there is my watch, which is right to a minute. You see the express must have passed the junction a quarter of an hour since. If it be a matter of consequence to you, George, I am sorry, upon my word I am."

So was Mr. Geith; he had n't intended to stay the night at the castle; but he could not help himself now.

"It is all the better for me," said the baronet, "but I did not intend to let you be late for all that. I wish you would come and stay with me here for a month or two. It would do you a world of good."

"And what would become of my business?" asked George.



“Business be hanged!” retorted Mark. “By the by, what did you say your business was?”

“I am an accountant,” said his cousin.

“Oh, I remember you were always a great fellow for figures. Well now, tell me, don’t accountants look into estates, and see how people really stand, and what they owe, and what they have?”

“Yes; I often have to do that both for bankrupts and folks who are solvent enough.”

“Well, that is just what I want done,” answered the baronet. “I want to know how I stand, and how long it would take me to clear the property, and what the surplus timber would realize if sold. You could come down here and look into things for me, I suppose? I wish you would. I know no more than the man in the moon how I am really situated.”

“I could n’t come here myself,” said George, who did not want to do so; “but I might send down a person to value the timber, and then it would be easy to ascertain your exact position. I should recommend you to face that, whether you effect a reconciliation with your mother or not.”

“There is no chance of a reconciliation with her unless” —

“Unless what?” asked his cousin, who well knew what was coming.

“Unless you would go to my mother and talk the matter over with her. She would consent to my marriage if you asked her, I have no doubt; and I should be grateful to you forever.”

“That might depend on whether Miss Hayles made a good wife or not, I should say,” answered George, a little cynically; “but without any reference to future gratitude at all, if it will oblige you in the present, I am quite ready to go to my aunt on your behalf. I can but fail.”

“I do not know how to thank you,” exclaimed the baronet.

“There is not the least necessity for you to try,” answered

George Geith, quietly. "If I can make peace between you and your mother, it will be but a very humble return for her kindness to me. All the pleasant days I can ever remember to have spent I owed to her; and though you and she cannot agree, Mark, I maintain there never breathed a better woman, nor a truer lady."

Having given utterance to which opinion, the accountant rose as if to end the conversation, and walking to one of the windows put aside the heavy curtains and looked out into the night.

While the cousins were talking, the moon had been climbing high into the heavens, and now bathed the woods and fields surrounding Snareham Castle in a flood of silver light.

"Will you take me round the old place, Mark?" asked George. "It may be many a long day before I see it again;" and the pair went out into the gardens, from whence they passed into the shrubberies, and then wandered back to the upper terrace, which they paced slowly side by side.

The old castle with its new wings flung a shadow over the two kinsmen, and from the building the ground sloped sharply down the hillside to the village of Great Snareham, that lay in the valley beneath.

Over the lower woods, George could see the Tower of Great Snareham Church rising above the trees. Buried in one of its vaults lay all his ancestors, and all his deceased relations, except it might be the two drowned sons of Mrs. Arthur Geith, whose bodies had never been recovered. Two more whose corpses were washed ashore after the accident, which left her childless, slept there tranquilly, as well as the late baronet, and his brother, the Rev. Adolphus Geith, and George's grand-uncle, the gallant Geith, who came back from Waterloo covered with wounds, to die. For generations the Geiths had been so small a band that the great house gathered its dead jealously together. Brothers and nephews, and cousins, however far divided in life, were

brought home to the family estate, and buried side by side. It had often been remarked in George's hearing, how few the coffins were which sufficed to contain those who had carried the name through previous centuries, and yet, so far as could be ascertained, none save the two boys were missing.

Some such observation the accountant made at length to his cousin, who answered, —

"Yes, there are two others, the son and the grandson of that old Sir Harry, who fought so well for King Charles. When we were clearing out the Norman Tower, we came on the son's portrait, being in a dark passage with its face to the wall, and the word traitor painted over the picture. I can't have the word obliterated without destroying the face, so I have hung it up in the gallery with an addendum of my own below: 'Hugh Geith took the side of the Parliament, and fell at Cropready Bridge.' His wife brought the body here, but across the porch which lay where the ladies' flower-garden is now, Sir Harry cursed him and her and her unborn child, and swore that the spawn of a traitor should never be master of Snareham.

"'Whereupon,' says the manuscript from which I derived my information, 'the lady bade the men who carried her husband's body place the corpse on the ground, and she kneeled down beside it and kissed his forehead, and then prayed, —

"'That if no son, or son's son, of the dead man ruled at Snareham, the estate might never pass from father to son, but come to be owned by strangers, and the name blotted out forever.'

"A miracle," finished Sir Mark; "but the poor soul was beside herself with grief. After she had finished her prayer, she rose and went away with her dead to the old parsonage house, where the then clergyman, who had known her husband from a boy, took her in and gave her food and shelter. Two days after she died in giving birth to a still-born child — a son, and they laid the three in one grave, in the church-

yard, together. So far the story ; now for a strange thing about the portrait. It is as like you as it can be. I shall now go in and look at it," and Sir Mark led the way across many a room, and along many a passage into the picture gallery, which was little more than a broad corridor, lighted by three long windows, and ornamented at each end by a steel mirror.

There were many male Geiths and their wives ; the former, frank, Saxon-looking men ; the latter, stiff, prudish dames, holding flower in hand or hawk on wrist, with a certain stately solemnity.

The daughters of the house were abundant, the sons few and far between ; surrounded by a bevy of girls hung Sir Harry, the Royalist, whilst at a little distance from him was suspended the portrait of his only son. From corner to corner of the picture ran the di-figuring letters, but still through the word, as through the bars of a prison, the grave thoughtful face looked down on the last male of an ancient house.

Over the neck of his horse an arm was thrown ; the left hand held a plumed hat ; long, dark curls fell over his shoulders, and a countenance which might have been George Geith's, had George ever looked handsome, stood out from the canvas.

"It is you, George, to a certainty," remarked his cousin after a long pause. "We always said we could not tell where you had got your face, but we know now. It is strange how some members of a family cast back, is it not?"

"I wonder," was the accountant's reply, "if that son did die, or whether he lived and had children."

"Whether he died or not," observed Sir Mark, a little coldly, "makes the marvel none the less. Neither my father, nor your father, or even uncle Arthur, resembled this man, and yet they three were brothers."

"True," answered George, as he passed over to look at the portrait of the late baronet.

How well he remembered the face — bold, daring, frank, sensual, handsome, smiling.

From father to son George Geith glanced critically.

“There can be no question about your descent, Mark,” he said at length.

“So I tell Mrs. Arthur, but she says she cannot trace the likeness,” answered the baronet, with a somewhat forced laugh.

“Then she must be blind,” was the accountant’s comment ; and as he turned away, those who knew George Geith well could have told that he was something more than satisfied, and something less than pleased.

## CHAPTER IX.

## BACK TO TOWN.

THROUGH the night George Geith lay awake thinking, or, rather, he lay passive, whilst all manner of vague ideas chased each other through his weary brain. The events of the day, the confessions of Mark, older memories, future plans, filled the mental canvas to overflowing; whilst over all these lay a kind of hazy wonder as to whether Mark were really the rightful owner of Snareham, as to what was the mystery lying between him and his mother. From boyhood Lady Geith had never cared for him. An only son, the heir of a large estate, he could do no right in her eyes. She had tried to be just, George knew, but George knew likewise that her trials in this respect had sometimes proved signal failures.

He could remember the triumphant pride of the late Sir Mark in his child, but he had never seen Lady Geith evince any pride in her son save when Mrs. Arthur Geith was present, at which periods she would have brought down the moon, could her so doing have pleased the future baronet. Mrs. Arthur had never been a friend to Mark. She had tried to sow enmity between him and George; she said openly her nephew was illegitimate, and her sister-in-law — but as her remarks were slanderous they need not be repeated here. As Lady Geith had disliked her husband, so Mrs. Arthur Geith disliked her. People knew that the Geiths had played at cross-purposes with their wives; that Mrs. Arthur would fain have stood in her ladyship's shoes,

and that her ladyship would gladly have taken her fortune and person to the country vicarage where Adolphus Geith made his humble home ; and perhaps Lady Geith's indifference to her son arose in dislike to his father, and her liking for George out of heart-breaking memories of the man she once hoped to marry.

The more he tried to unravel the skein, the more tangled it grew. Was Mark, as had once been suggested by Mrs. Arthur, his brother ? That was utterly impossible ; for his mother would never have sold her own flesh and blood to aid a deception. Had Mark been changed at nurse ? His likeness to his father forbade that idea. Had the late baronet introduced a felon heir into the family ? Lady Geith would never have tolerated such an intrusion ; she would only have been too glad to tell the story years before, and confound the plans of both father and child. There was but one solution of the enigma which George Geith did not reject as worthless.

A previous contract, a living wife, which rendered Lady Geith's marriage null and void, and her children illegitimate.

Might not this, as the years went on, account for much which had puzzled George and piqued the curiosity of society ? Her keen desire for him to marry Lettice, her only daughter ; her laying them out for each other from the time they were children, and weeping so bitterly when she told George his little wife was dead ; might she not in this way have wished to make him reparation ? Might her leaving him her fortune not be after all but some plan of doing justice at last ? Mrs. Lemon possibly knew of the prior connection ; that might account for the influence she exercised over his aunt. His mother might have guessed the truth, and broken off their intimacy with her sister-in-law in consequence.

If this were so, George could pity, ay, and though he was the loser by the fraud, forgive. As for any insinuation which made Lady Geith a deliberate sinner and hypocrite, the ac-

countant indignantly rejected the idea. He had ever found Lady Geith thoughtful, and good, and kind ; and he was not going to have his faith in her destroyed, even through his own. But at this point the accountant shook his thoughts aside for a moment.

Was he going mad? Was he about to turn imaginative in his practical manhood? What reason had he to suppose that Mark's title to Snareham was other than good, beyond Mrs. Arthur's angry assertions and the old tradition, the origin of which he had just learnt, that no son would ever succeed his father at the castle.

Till Mark's time, no son for generations ever had. That was curious! Mark himself had remarked he was glad to break the spell, and George had dryly replied,—

“I do not doubt it, as you benefit by the change.”

But was George going to be influenced by old women's tales? Was he going to leave his business to run after a will-o'-the-wisp? If Snareham brought bad nights and evil thoughts ; if it were a snare to sense and alive to discontent ; if it were a foe to domestic happiness, a cause of repining and dissatisfaction, George Geith would have none of it. He would go back to London, and work, and fight and win. He would, being a poor man, renounce the position which none but a rich man could occupy with honor. He could be no hanger-on of a great house ; he would have no heart-burnings, no such speculations as disturbed him now for the future. And he closed his eyes and tried to go to sleep. Then the face of the Puritan obtruded itself ; then he saw Cissy Hayles gliding along the terraces, led by charming Lady Geith ; then he was back in Fen Court, laboring to free himself from the old chains ; then he was at Morelands ; then quarrelling with Mrs. Hayles ; again shrinking from the rector's statement that he knew why he had left the Church ; and at last all the distorted shapes faded away and left the over-tired man sleeping quietly.

Next morning when he awoke, the fantastic procession of



the night was gone, and George Geith arose and dressed himself quickly, so as to catch the first up-train to London.

"So you won't stay," said his cousin. "You won't be sociable and come and relieve the tedium of a poor devil's life; but you will go back to the city and serve Mammon for seven years longer. Well, I won't say you are wrong; I am satisfied nature made a mistake when she ever gave a Geith a fortune. We are a race intended to work, and you are going to prove the truth of my proposition. You will be rich some day when I am poor. When I have made all Snareham a pond to flock my ducks, you will be buying properties and standing for the county. When I am retrenching on the Continent, you will be a great man in London."

"I shall never be a great man anywhere," George replied, and yet his thoughts belied his words. He was looking forward to wealth, position, consideration; and if these things do not constitute greatness to the children of this world, I should like to know what does.

"I wish you would let me give you a leg up," observed Sir Mark.

"Thank you heartily," answered George, picking his phrases out of his cousin's vocabulary; "but if ever I reach the winning-post, I should like to be able to say: I chose my horse; I trained him; I mounted and I rode the race without a helping hand from anybody."

"You are as obstinate as old Sir Harry," remarked his cousin, peevishly; "but if you won't be helped, and if you will go, it is time we were on the road. When do you think you can see my mother? You perceive I am not above asking a favor from you."

"The rich man confers a favor on the poor by requesting his services," said George, with that bitterness which crept up every now and then to the surface; "but a favor crushes the poor man, and destroys his liberty of action."

"Well, I'll be hanged," retorted Sir Mark, "if I'd see things with your eyes for a dukedom."

"Things stand in different lights for you and me," was the accountant's tranquil reply; "and it is, therefore, natural they should look different to us."

And with this truism, George Geith may be said to have taken his leave of Snareham Castle; for five minutes afterwards the cousins were driving away from its entrance gates to the station as fast as Sir Mark's favorite horse could take them.

They had no time to spare; indeed, as the baronet pulled up, they could see the express coming grandly along the line.

"Good-bye; do come to see me soon again," said Sir Mark, standing outside the carriage-door, and grasping hands with his cousin.

"Good-bye, Mark, and thank you. I will be sure to write whenever I have seen" —

But the train was off, and George could not finish his sentence. The baronet waved his hand in token of farewell, and already the train was panting out of the station, and the cousins were parted once again.

But George caught another glimpse of his relative at a curve where the line crossed the road leading to Snareham Castle. Up the highway the accountant could see the terrible black horse come tearing on.

For an instant Mark slackened the reins, whilst he nodded in answer to his cousin's signal of recognition; and taking advantage of this oversight, the animal made a leap forward, and then started off at full gallop under the archway over which the train was passing.

Shifting his position to the other window, George watched the dog-cart spinning away towards Snareham Castle, with Mark leaning back in it, and pulling in the frightened animal with all his might. Luckily it was up-hill the whole way to Snareham from the station, and the accountant had the

atisfaction of seeing that his cousin was getting the best of the battle before a cutting shut horse and driver, and all the well-remembered plain, from his view. And so they parted; so the one man went back to his castle, and the other to his office; so the two last young men of an old house turned each into his separate path.

It is with that George elected to tread we have to do; so we may just as well travel back with him to London, and see what he thought of by the way.

Putting aside the dreams of night, — refusing, as in the past he had always done, when in his sober senses, to speculate on his anomalous position, or to think of the possibility of himself ever inheriting Snareham and a title, George began to consider his own prospects *de nouveau*, and to raise up a great Tower of Babel, the golden pinnacles of which touched the skies. Did he mourn about Cissy Hayles? did he grieve because the little sunbeam of love which had fallen so softly across the darkness of his heart, was proved to have no warmth nor power of vitality in it? No; George was glad to know Cissy and her mamma as they were, — glad to think he had escaped from the danger scatheless.

He fancied how much harder his hard life would be if united to such a wife as Cissy; he imagined the horror of having to listen to Mrs. H.'s opinions, and, worse still, of having perhaps to conform to some of her ideas. He thought of the tirades against business he should hear if he had the misfortune to be Mrs. Hayles's son-in-law. He had a horrid vision of the way in which society, and the opinion of the world, and the opinion of dear Cissy's friends would have been thrown at him by her worthy parent. It is a fine thing to see a woman you have loved engaged to be married to a grander person than yourself; for there is not a flaw, mental or physical, that is not revealed to you then. You change in a moment from being her lover to being her critic; and she comes out of the shade she has hitherto affected, and floats up and down in the full sunshine of self-glorification,

in order to show, all unconsciously, the frailty and flimsiness of the butterfly you would once have passed through brake and through brier to secure. Many a man, though, will moan, even after a butterfly, if she be only pretty enough; but George Geith could never have done this. Once satisfy him the star he worshipped was willing to shine on any one, and there was an end of his fancy. Should he sit down and mourn because the illusion was dispelled? Emphatically not. He had n't bought the picture, and he was not going to grieve because he had seen it in a fair light. Let her go. If Mark liked her, well and good. She would make a good wife for a baronet; but for a poor man, for a struggling man, — gracious heavens! what right had a poor and struggling man to think of a wife at all? What were wives? Curses sometimes, luxuries always, helpmates never. Why, even in the garden of Eden, George reflected, Adam's wife could not behave herself, but must needs bring trouble to her husband and all that came after him. No; he decided against matrimony altogether; he reflected that money, which could buy all things, was the only solid good; and as he knew by experience that industry could command money, he returned to London resolved to think of business more persistently than ever, to make wealth his object, work his means.

Hitherto he had met with no check in his business, and like most men who have done a small certain trade, and kept their accounts close up, he fancied that he should, with prudence, be able gradually to increase his connection, and continue as fortunate in the future as he had been in the past.

He forgot then what he had been told in his youth, viz., that a man never makes a good rider till he has been thrown. Had he remembered this, he might have known that the management of the business steed is rarely understood by those who have not, some time or other, licked the dust.

There! a sudden change in the markets, the failure of a good house; the upset of a basket holding all his eggs, and

the man is down! Help him up, ye Samaritans; or at least stand aside and do not trample him till he can rise of himself.

He is blinded with mud and dirt; he is stunned by the force of the fall. He is giddy and confused; but still give him a hand and let him mount again, for he may do well yet. If he be wise he will not attempt impossibilities. He will attend to his business, he will eschew mar-ly ground. He will not try to ride over spiked walls; he will not exhaust his strength and then attempt to race with those who come fresh and powerfully mounted on the ground. He will remember that misfortune is usually another name for folly, that being deceived implies having been over-confident, and so goes on safely to the end.

But for the man who is always being thrown, my readers, do not waste your pity on him. Let him get out of the mire as he can; let the boys jeer him when he talks of accidents; let him subside into clerkship — servitude — whatever opens for him, and believe he is safer there, and that it is better for the community he should be there than ruining other people and running the risk of breaking his own neck.

One fall, but not a dozen, makes a man cautious. Many a man is courageous merely because he does not understand danger, and therefore the shock which teaches prudence is oftentimes the mere prelude to ultimate success.

This shock George Geith had never felt, and therefore he plunged back into the business vortex, over-sanguine of victory, over-confident in himself.

He counted the harvests that were to make him rich and independent; he saw the end, but not the road to it; and as the omnibus that conveyed him from Euston Square to the city lumbered through the streets, his seat beside the driver was converted into a throne, from whence he issued edicts to fate and conferred honors and favors on himself innumerable.

When he reached Fen Court there were people waiting the chance of his return. That was satisfactory. He could

recollect the time when it was he who waited and not his clients. Now, his outer office looked like that of a prosperous man; and with a certain sense of triumph at the business success he had achieved, the accountant attended to those who were bringing corn to his mill.

The first man who entered the inner office — that private sanctum which commanded a view of the churchyard and the trees — was short and stout in figure, with a greasy face, and lank, unwholesome-looking hair. He had a great deal to say about the weather, which did not please him, as a slight rain that made the streets greasy had just set in.

“Sha’n’t sell six-penn’orth to-day,” he opined; “it’s well to be you whose trade don’t vary with the weather.”

“It is better to be you who make a hundred and fifty per cent. when the weather is fine,” retorted Mr. Geith.

“Oh! come now,” expostulated the draper, “that is too bad, and you a bachelor.”

“The dread of your bills is likely to keep me so,” was the reply; whereupon the pair laughed and got to business.

Mr. Acton’s books had fallen into a tangle which he wanted the accountant to unravel. This was the sum of his first statement; but it soon transpired that he wanted something else, viz., to have the work done for less than half-price.

Mr. Geith, however, was firm; there were days when he would not listen to any abatement, and this chanced to be one of them. Moreover, though mentally well balanced, he could not come down straight away from the terrace of Snareham Castle to the level of Mr. Acton’s shop, and so he ended the discussion more abruptly than was his wont.

“How and ever,” said the draper, in reply, “I cannot afford your price nohow. Five pounds is the outside I can give.”

“And ten is my charge, and the least I shall take,” answered Mr. Geith loftily.

“Then I must carry the work to somebody else, that’s all,” and Mr. Acton reluctantly took up his hat.

"That is a matter for you to decide," remarked the accountant, and he turned to his letters as a signal for the other to go. But the other would not take the hint.

"You will think about it," he suggested, after a pause. "Certainly not," was the reply, and Mr. Geith began cutting open the envelopes.

"Would another sovereign," tried the client. "Now, Mr. Acton," said George, decidedly, "you are but wasting my time and your own. The lowest price I can take is ten pounds. If you like to give that sum, well and good. If not, well and good still; only I do not make up your books for less."

He had opened his letters by this time, and began reading them as if Mr. Acton were not standing opposite to him. Business is not improving to the manners. Lord Chesterfield himself, had he been compelled to earn his bread in the city, would probably have had to choose between starvation and a polished address.

George Geith had made his choice at a very early period of his commercial life, and so went on perusing his letters whilst Mr. Acton watched him.

At first the draper considered this absorption a ruse, but after a time, finding no notice taken of him, he removed his arm from the corner of the desk, and observed, —

"I will consider the matter then."

"Very well," answered George.

"Good day," said the draper.

"Good day," replied the accountant, and the door opening on the landing closed behind that client.

As it did so, client No. 2 entered from the outer office, and Mr. Geith laid down his letters.

This visitor proved to be the brother of a person in difficulties who wanted a balance-sheet prepared. The man being steeped in debt was, of course, indifferent about expense. All he wished was expedition. Could the business be completed without delay?

"Assuredly," and the matter was settled. No. 2 went out, and No. 3 came in. This individual wanted money, and having got it, buttoned his coat, resumed his umbrella, lifted his gloves, and departed, making way for No. 4, who turned out to be Mr. Foss.

"What can I do for you," asked the accountant, after he had shaken hands with the young man. "I hope you do not want any business help from me."

"I do and I don't, if you can understand that," answered Mr. Foss, with a blush Miss Gilling might have envied. "I called to ask if you knew of anybody in want of a clerk."

"Why, do you know any one in want of a situation?" asked Mr. Geith.

"Yes; I should be glad of anything I could get," replied Mr. Foss, and he blushed again a deeper red.

"I thought you had such a first-rate berth at Twine's," remarked the accountant.

"So I had," said the young man, ruefully, "but I got notice on New Year's day, and left last Saturday. They pay everybody weekly, from the cashier down, in that office, and so I'm adrift."

"What is their reason for parting with you?" inquired George.

"Mr. Twine's nephew wanted a place, and mine was the only one they could give him."

"What did you learn there?" asked George; "dock-work chiefly, was it not?"

"Yes; and wrote letters, and used to help the cashier sometimes too. I am a pretty good hand at accounts," added Mr. Foss, with a longing look round Mr. Geith's office, which look made that gentleman smile.

"Can't Mr. Bemmidge make room for you?" he inquired.

"He has not work enough for himself," replied the other, "and he knows no one wanting a clerk. It was he told me to come to you, and said most likely you would be able to put me in the way of doing something."



“ Perhaps you both thought I might be requiring a second clerk myself;” observed the accountant, at which suggestion Mr. Foss colored to the very roots of his hair, and took refuge in absolute silence. “ I don’t know that I can take you on,” continued Mr. Geith, after a short pause, “ or that, if I could, my place would be worth your acceptance ; but I will think the matter over, and you might look in again in a day or two. Meantime, if you hear of anything better, don’t consider yourself bound in any way to me.” And George Geith turned to his letters again as a hint to Mr. Foss that he considered the business which had brought him there ended, and that the sooner he left the office the better he would be pleased.

“ Good afternoon, and thank you,” said the young man, who had seen enough of business to know clearly what the accountant meant ; and he was going away without offering his hand, only that George prevented him. They were not master and man yet, and perhaps the accountant’s conscience accused him for having been rude to a person who was so very easily snubbed as Harry Foss. At any rate he said, “ Good-bye, and if I can do anything for you, I will,” in a tone which made the applicant’s face brighten considerably, and sent him away in a happier frame of mind than that in which he had been making his visit.

Before he entered the office he had intended to tell Mr. Geith how important a thing it was for him to get a situation at once ; how he had a mother and sister dependent on him for daily bread ; how hard he was able to work, and for how small a salary he would be willing to labor. He had made up quite a little volume on his way from Abchurch Lane to Fen Court, but somehow, when he got into the commercial presence-chamber, the narrative was forgotten, and his fine sentences were exchanged for the few bold phrases I have set down. He would have told all about himself to Mr. Geith that night at Ivy Cottage ; but Mr. Geith in office was a different man from Mr. Geith at

Andrew Bemmidge's. He was quite as formidable an individual as Mr. Twine; and Mr. Twine moved among his clerks like an eastern despot among his slaves.

If he were accepted at Fen Court, the young man saw he would, spite of Mr. Bemmidge's acquaintance with the principal, be but a clerk till the end of the chapter. He was a little surprised, perhaps, but he need not have been, for it is in the nature of business to make aristocrats of employers, of millionnaires, and of creditors. And of the importance of marking this line broadly, George Geith was well aware, for it is not easy "to blow up a man who can answer you on terms of equality; it is a very difficult matter to keep a clerk straight who is a friend also."

"If Foss comes, he will have to rough it like anybody else. I can make no distinction here," reflected the accountant; from which remark it will be seen George Geith was fitted for the path he had chosen in all respects. He even dared to take on a man he knew, and keep him in his place,—an experiment on which, I think, few in his position would have cared to venture.

He had just got rid of all his clients, and was going to answer his letters, when he heard some one coming up the stairs, and immediately afterwards his clerk entered the office to inquire whether Mr. Molozane could see Mr. Geith.

"What can the man want?" groaned the accountant. "Send him in, Simmons; but remember I can't be interrupted again till after post-time." Having uttered which mandate, Mr. Geith descended from his stool, and stood with his back to the fire awaiting Mr. Molozane's entrance.

"I am afraid I am very troublesome," began that gentleman; "if it be inconvenient for you to speak to me now, I can wait. I am not in any hurry."

"Providing I get my letters finished in time for post, I am quite at your service," said George, and he motioned his visitor to a chair.

But Mr. Molozane would not sit down. He came and

stood before the fireplace, and looked at the blazing coals, as he began, —

“There is no more hope about the mines, Mr. Geith.”

“I am sorry to hear that ; I trust you are safe.”

“No ; I could not sell. I wish to God,” went on the poor dupe, vehemently, “I had come to you twelve months ago, I might have got rid of the shares then ; but that is all past now, so there is no use talking about it.”

“What have you heard fresh in the matter ?” asked the accountant.

“The captain of the miners has absconded, and the directors are going to wind up the concern,” and Mr. Molozane dropped his hand on the mantelpiece, with a despairing gesture, as he spoke.

George did not answer for a minute, he only drew the long back breath so common among business people, and looked away from Mr. Molozane ere he spoke.

“I am afraid it is a bad business,” he said at last ; “do you know what the liabilities are ?”

“No ; I cannot learn anything about them.”

“Nor the assets ?”

“There are none. The captain has taken away close on with him. The secretary says the police are on his track ; but I have no idea they will find him.”

“Nor I,” answered George ; “and if they did, it would not benefit you much, for he is not likely to have the money now. Well, whoever else has lost, one man is sure to be safe.”

“Who is that, — the captain ?”

“Your secretary, Punt ; he always feathers his nest, no matter who else loses down. How do the directors purpose winding up ?”

“I do not know. Is there more than one way ?”

“Yes, there are two : one by which you know the worst at once ; and another, by which you learn it after years. The first has the advantage in one way, however, it settles

the truth immediately ; but the second enables a man to look his position in the face, and see whether he can eventually recover himself."

"Will you tell me exactly," said Mr. Molozane, "what the extent of my liability is likely to be?"

"That depends entirely upon the amount the company is in debt, and the solvency of the other shareholders. If all are good men, the loss will be more general than individual ; but if many are men of straw, the payments will have to be made by the few who are able and willing to do so."

"What do you mean by willing?" asked Mr. Molozane. "Is there any choice in the matter?"

"There is no choice for you," answered the accountant ; "for others there may be."

"How is my position different from that of others?" inquired Mr. Molozane.

"Your position is not different ; but *you* are, or else I am greatly mistaken. Men back out of these kind of things every day. They leave the country ; they sell their estates ; they get rid of their businesses ; they make over their property to some relative on the first sign of danger. There are a hundred ways for men to escape the consequences of their own folly ; but there is no honorable way, Mr. Molozane, and I should be advising you wrongly if I said there were."

"Then what do you suppose will be the result of it all to me?"

"That depends on the extent of your own property, and of the company's liabilities. You may not have to pay much, and if you have, you may possess sufficient to pay everything and still leave a surplus."

"And is there nothing I can do meantime? Am I to sit with my hands folded, and see my money taken away by thieves?—for I can call them nothing else, Mr. Geith, but thieves, damned thieves!"

"If you mean, can you resist the claim, most certainly not ; but you could go down into Cornwall and see for your-

self what the Sythlow Mines are. It has happened before now that valuable mines have been declared unproductive, and sold to friends or the directors, who made fortunes whilst the shareholders were ruined. Remember, I don't think such will prove to be the case in this instance; but still, if I were you, I should go and judge for myself."

"Thank you; I will follow your advice. And now, Mr. Geith, you must not refuse a fee to-day. I have no one else to come to but you, and no one else to consult with; and if you decline to receive payment, you will shut me out from the only adviser I have."

And the poor, proud gentleman, whose pride had received such a mortal blow within the last few months, laid down a fee, carefully done up in paper like a doctor's, on the chimney-piece. So long as he had a sixpence left he did not want any one to give him anything, even kindness, for nothing.

Could the accountant have with any reason accepted the fee, I think he would have taken it; but, as it was, he pushed the money gently away, and said, —

"As I have done nothing for you so far, Mr. Molozane, I cannot take a fee; but, unless you know what you have and what you owe much better than the majority of the gentlemen with whom I come in contact, you will want an accountant's help ere long. If you like to come to me then, I will make a charge. Now, however, I cannot."

"But the time I have occupied," urged Mr. Molozane.

"I wish all my clients occupied as little," said George; "I should be either an idler or a richer man. I have to listen not merely to business, but also to family histories here, and nobody thinks of paying me for doing so."

"I wish you would let me pay you, though," entreated Mr. Molozane.

"You shall, certainly, if ever I do any business for you; and, perhaps, if you ascertain anything about the mines you will let me know. Some of my clients may be inter-

ested in the matter, for aught I can tell ; and at any rate, I like to be 'up' in these things. I hope the affair may not turn out so badly as you fear."

"It cannot turn out worse, at any rate," said the country gentleman, mournfully, and he held out his hand in farewell.

George could not but notice how much more meekly he performed this ceremony than on the occasion of his previous visit. A mightier leveller, so far as this world is concerned, than death, was bringing the man who despised trade down to something lower far than any honest calling.

Away in the distance he saw beggary looming before him ; and with that awful prescience growing clearer and clearer at every step, the old social distinctions faded into insignificance, and Ambrose Alfred Molozane, Esq., of Molozane Park, in the County of Herts, discovered that there was some faint comfort to be derived from telling his anxieties and his misery, even to a man who mixed with low people, and transacted business in Fen Court.

## CHAPTER X.

## LADY GEITH.

**WHEN** Mr. Molozane came out of Mr. Geith's office, the January day was drawing to a close, and darkness and a penetrating rain were striving which should reach the City first.

Up and down Fenchurch Street the country gentleman looked disconsolately ; not that he cared about the state of the weather. Hail or shine, it was much the same to him. The Sythlow Mines were not going to make his fortune ; nay, were most probably going to ruin him. What, therefore, did the rain signify. Let it rain. He did not quarrel with the wet, slippery pavement, the streaming gutters, the splashing cabs, or the women who carried umbrellas as soldiers carry fixed bayonets, charging the unhappy passer-by with them. There are people, it is said, who have some choice concerning the weather and the place in which they shall be hung ; but Mr. Molozane could not have understood any solicitude of this kind.

He felt the rope about his neck, and nothing could add to the misery of that sensation.

What did the puddles which reflected back the light from the gas-lamps signify to him ? What did the wet signify ? What did anything signify ? And in this pleasant frame of mind he proceeded up Cullum Street, and along Leadenhall Street, and so, through the pelting rain, to Shoreditch Station, where he sat him down to wait patiently till such time as his train should start, and ruminated, weary and fasting, on his position.

Sitting there, with the vice of Whitechapel, and the want of Bethnal Green, and the sin and the misery huddled together to the west of Shoreditch, within almost a stone's-throw of where he sat, he verily believed himself to be the most wretched man breathing. And yet he had only lost money; while, gracious heavens! there were those out on the street he had just left,— out, with the gas-lamps streaming on their haggard faces,— out, reeling away from the doors of fine palaces,— out, with thin soaking garments, with poor shoes that let the mud in at every step, who had lost money, and home, and virtue, and, so far as man could tell, their souls too. I don't know how it is, that no depth of misery seems able to make its cry heard unto another; that wretchedness is ever blind to the fact of there being a trouble greater and more hopeless than its own; that whatever sorrow comes to a man he considers the worst mortality can be called on to suffer. It is not so with joy. From the hill-tops of success and pleasure come glad shouts of triumph over the plain; and humanity, no matter on how lofty a peak it stands, ever considers that the criers are borne down to its level from higher pinnacles than its own. Success knows no contentment, wretchedness no alleviation. The one is all eyes, ears, and attention, and the other, blind, deaf, sullen. "Why should they have more than I?" shouts the man who ought to be happy. "Was ever mortal so hardly dealt with?" is the groan of each of us who feels the lash of trouble laid never so lightly on his back.

"What have I done that this trouble should have come upon me?" thought Mr. Molozane, as he sat in the dingy waiting-room.

"I wonder if any of those I see passing me have made such miserable failures of their lives as I," murmured Lady Geith, looking with weary eyes out into the gathering darkness.

And she sighed. With reason too, for she had sinned. And not all the tears she could weep, not all the groans she



could utter, might ever undo the wrong she had done, or make reparation for it. Yet it may fairly be questioned whether Lady Geith ever fully realized to herself the enormity of the crime of which she had been guilty. She felt the inconvenience it entailed on herself and others. She would have given much to have been able to get out of the tangle she herself had woven. She was very sorry. She had suffered acutely. But, nevertheless, I do not think she knew, so far, the meaning of the word repentance.

She did not know what it was to lie down with her sorrow at night, and get up with it in the morning. She did not know what it was to weep tears that blister the heart instead of relieving it. She had not the faintest conception of what it is to turn back upon the road of evil, and facing the past with its sin and its sorrow, strive to do right, at least, let the cost be what it will.

She had never been taught what God's providence teaches to every willing scholar: sooner or later, that a sin may never remain unatoned for; that wrong must be righted by some one. The days of the Lord are long; years, it may be, pass away, and the morning when the fault was committed seems so far back in our reckoning of time, that we forget the immutable law of retribution. But the noontide, and the evening, and the night come on for all that, and the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children, and the wrong is righted at last, when many weep for the crime of one, and the innocent are swept into the whirlpool which, it was thought, could not touch even the guilty.

"Turn back; turn back!" is the cry of experience to the inexperienced, "whilst it is yet time. You cannot flee from your sin forever. There may be a mid-day in your life, it is true, when the wrong can throw no shadow; but the wrong is travelling with you, before you, behind you, beside you, for all that. And you must face your trouble now or hereafter; let it be now, when you know the worst, when you know who will suffer, who will be benefited. In the

future there will be wives, now unmarried; children, yet unborn; relations, who are now strangers; enemies, who, far and few, are indifferent. There is a great multitude travelling on to meet you in the distance, who will all be involved in your trouble; who will weep; who will curse; who will triumph; who will sin; and who will suffer anguish because of this wrong, which you are permitting to rush onward towards them. 'Turn back; turn back!' and conscience, echoing the cry, warns the sinner to strive to right the wrong whilst there is yet time to do it."

To Lady Geith experience and conscience had both cried in vain. She was sorry; she had repented; she would have retraced her roads could she have taken one entire leaf out of her life, and undone the deception which had rendered her existence miserable. Failing this, she decided to drift on with the tide, to repair her fault in her own way, and to make such compromises with her conscience as might insure its silence and approval.

She was much like a child who has done mischief, and who, while sorry for having done it, thinks if it can but conceal the fault, there will be an end of the matter. Great consequences springing from little causes, great trees growing silently out of the tiniest seeds, were things Lady Geith did not think about. Present inconvenience she felt and tried to get rid of; but she now entirely shut her eyes to the question of future trouble and injustice. Had not her life been a burden to her? Had she not wept, and suffered, and repented?

What more could be demanded of her? Let the irrevocable past lie buried.

But somehow the past would not lie buried. It had a way of appearing before her, which was unpleasant in the extreme. Every now and then a darkness came over her soul, and out of the darkness there crept the old, old days, each with its story, each with its trouble.

For Lady Geith's had not been a happy life. Granted

that to a great extent she had made her own unhappiness. What then? Why, then, that was no comfort; and so, sitting in the dusk, in Halkin Street, looking out at the wet pavement, at the glimmering lamps she passed.

Over years and years she travelled, leaning back in her chair listening to the steps of the passers-by, hearing the sound of distant street-organs, watching the rain as it came down faster and faster, she journeyed quicker than ever express train swept across England; from age to youth, to her girlhood, to the happy, and hopeful, and innocent long ago.

What had she made of the road since traversed? Watch that which she is contemplating, and then judge.

She is looking at a hopeless love; hopeless, not merely because the man she loved was poor, but because he did not return the love she, a great heiress, was wasting on him. In that she had little to blame herself. With Adolphus Geith, who never thought that a decorous flirtation, conducted on the most religious principles, and in an unexceptionably clerical manner, could bear bitter fruit to any one, perhaps the case was different. He ought to have thought; he ought to have known, he said so himself when he found the strength and weakness of the motherless girl, who had never before stretched out her hand towards anything without possessing it. Her weakness was loving him, her strength forgiving him, and heaping such coals of fire on his head by her generosity that she developed everything which was good in the man's nature, and caused his life to be a more useful one than it could ever have been, had he not met her. She had outlived that love; she had put it aside as a sham and a grief, and looking back, she could see that the one good thing she could remember doing was loving the clergyman's wife, and being mother, friend, sister, all in one, to that most lovable of God's creatures, beautiful, fragile, light-haired, blue-eyed, tender-hearted Rose Stanhope! Thinking of her, spanning in a moment all the years that lay

between the present and that day when she saw Adolphus Geith's chosen bride for the first time; tears came into Lady Geith's eyes, and rolled slowly down her cheeks. What a clinging, tender plant it was: how it twined itself around the young heiress, ever putting forth some fresh tendril of sympathy and affection as time went by, and brought trouble with it to her friend. What a slight, frail thing it seemed, and yet the day came when Lady Geith felt it tear itself away and renounce her.

"If that my secret killed her," thought Lady Geith, and the thought might have been true, for circumstances made the secret a very grievous one to keep, and Rose Geith felt the struggle between right and wrong, between gratitude and self-interest, severely.

Had she lived, it is a question whether she would have continued mute; but she died, and Lady Geith's secret remained intact.

The reader, of course, by this time guesses what that secret was; but before confirming the truth of his idea, I must go back a little and tell how the temptation arose; how Lady Geith came to be so false a woman.

When first she knew the man she afterwards wed, there were three Geiths brothers; three all unmarried: one, Mark, lived with his uncle at Snareham Castle; one, Arthur, was a barrister with very few briefs; while Adolphus was curate of Little Snareham, in which parish his father was lord of the manor, squire magistrate, what you will, providing always it be respectable, pompous, worldly, and wealthy.

Squire Hollington was a man of old family; his ancestors had been Druids, and he was able to trace them from the period Stonehenge was erected down to the nineteenth century. But long though his pedigree might be, it was not longer than his purse. From the Druids, or from some nearer relatives, he inherited estates which brought him in six or seven thousand a-year, and from his mother a private fortune of fifty thousand pounds which he would infallibly

have secured to his nephew with the property, but that unhappy young man had been led in an evil moment to question the truthfulness of this genealogical record.

He only doubted the Druids, but that was sufficient. The squire abandoned the idea of a match between him and his daughter then and there, and made no objections to Mark Geith when he came to woo the heiress. Mark Geith was the heir apparent of Snareham Castle and the baronetage. The Geiths were people of old family also. There was not a drop of blood in their veins but could be proved of the due shade of crimson. It had been poured out like water in the service of kings, good, bad, and indifferent; it had never mingled with impure streams. The Geiths' wives had been ever gentlewomen; some poor and some plain it might be, but still ladies. There had never, so far as he could hear, been a Geith mad, or epileptic, or consumptive, or scrofulous, and this was an immense recommendation.

"If pure blood could keep men from death, the Hollingtons would be immortal," he used to boast. "There never was one of us," and the "us" included the Druids, I may remark, "married into a diseased family, until my brother chose for his wife a woman whose father was in trade and died of softening of the brain. And look at the result: look at Harold, an effeminate, delicate, lisping creature, who disputes our pedigree, and thinks all men are equal."

There was no fear of Mark Geith thinking all men equal so long as it buttered his bread to believe otherwise, wherefore he humored the old man to the top of his bent, and made himself as agreeable as might be to the daughter, who married the elder brother after loving the younger, and who was so simple as never to think that a prospective baronet might be marrying her less for what she was than for what she had.

The Hollington property, that is, the property which was entailed, passed on the death of the old squire to his nephew; but over and above this there were lands, and houses, and

moneys in the funds which came to Lady Geith strictly secured to her sole and separate use for her lifetime, and to her younger children after her.

That his daughter should remain childless never entered into the calculations of the squire. No Hollington's quiver had ever been destitute of juvenile arrows. Indeed, but that death had proved as kind as nature, they might have sometimes seemed inconveniently full. Squire Hollington's father, for instance, was the eldest of a family of thirteen. Squire Hollington himself had three brothers and seven sisters. His wife bore him four daughters and two sons; but one of the former died in infancy, and a couple more a few years later of scarletina; whilst, as for the sons, the eldest, Cedric, was killed by a fall from his horse; and the youngest sank in India under the climate. People said he had trusted too much to the Hollington constitution, and perhaps this was true. Anyhow, he died and left the squire with only one child, Selina, who became Mrs. —, and afterwards Lady Geith.

That she should not rear sons and daughters, never, as I said before, crossed Squire Hollington's mind, and he therefore went to his grave in peace, and left his money as stated.

Just then, Arthur Geith, the barrister, dropped matrimonially into what his friends considered a good thing, and took unto himself a brewer's daughter, who brought to her new home a fortune of a hundred thousand pounds, which had been made out of Thames water, hops and malt. It was a seeming certainty for a struggling and penniless man, and Arthur Geith cared very little for the fact that his wife had just set her cap at the prospective baronet, and failed to catch him. He was an easy-going man, who hated work and loved pleasure, and who was willing to pay any price for being landed high and dry above the sea of poverty, in which his early youth had been passed. For all the Geiths, save the heads of the family, were poor as church-mice.

Till the death of his uncle, the eldest brother, the prospective heir, had only an allowance of five hundred a year and his wife's fortune.

Mrs. Arthur Geith's money, and Mrs. Arthur Geith herself, proved eventually causes of dissension amongst the Geith clan. She ruled her husband, she reduced him to a mere cipher, she snubbed the clergyman, she insulted his wife, and as the years rolled by and brought her children with them to Snareham Castle, she began to regard herself as presumptive Lady Geith, and manager of the property. She had five sons and two daughters, — five fine lads stood between Adolphus Geith's only living boy and the title. There was no child at Snareham, had never been one, and so Mrs. Arthur was everlastingly taking her boys to the Castle, and exhibiting the eldest to visitors as "the heir."

A well-bred woman had no chance of victory in the vulgar warfare of petty annoyances which Mrs. Arthur waged. As though Lady Geith's marriage had not proved unhappy enough, without any aggravating circumstances being thrown into the scale, Mrs. Arthur must needs put her hand on the beam and make her sister-in-law more wretched still. The culminating point came when Sir Mark "wished to God that he had a child to rid him of that woman's airs."

"I have heard," answered Lady Geith, "that in your family no son ever succeeds his father, so there would seem to be little use in having one."

On which Sir Mark damned old proverbs, and cursed his luck, and left his wife in tears.

Tears were Lady Geith's most grievous sin in her husband's eyes. He once said she looked more like his mother than his wife; and the remark, though brutal, was true, for at eight-and-twenty — ten years after her most ill assorted marriage — Lady Geith was a miserable, discontented, peevish woman.

Not that she cared, in reality, about children of her own succeeding to the title. If Mrs. Arthur's boys had been out

of the way, she could have looked with complacency on Adolphus Geith's son as the future heir of Snareham ; but as it was, the feud between the two women had grown to hatred ; and to have caused annoyance to her sister-in-law, to have insured her plans being frustrated, Lady Geith would cheerfully have gone down to the family vault, and stretched herself in her coffin with a smile.

Matters had come to this pass, when one midsummer-day, after Mrs. Arthur had been exhibiting her eldest-born to some visitors, Miss Teddesley, who was Lady Geith's companion, remarked in her softest, lowest tone, —

“ Do you not think, Mrs. Geith, that calling your dear boy the heir, may be a little premature ? ”

“ How — why — what do you mean ? ” asked the other.

“ Only that, if a son were to come, it might cause ” —

“ It is not possible ! ” interrupted Mrs. Arthur, and she turned just red and then white at the bare suggestion.

“ I think it possible,” said Miss Teddesley, significantly ; “ but of course I am not supposed to think at all ; ” and she sighed and folded her hands demurely, as though, whilst submitting to the supposition, she denied its accuracy.

“ My dear Miss Teddesley,” began Mrs. Arthur, (when had she ever spoken civilly to the companion before,) “ what are your reasons for making such an extraordinary statement. I cannot believe it possible.”

“ I would n't then, Mrs. Geith,” observed the companion, soothingly. “ If my idea should prove correct, the evil will be bad enough when it comes without anticipating it.”

“ Many women,” went on Mrs. Arthur, “ would say they were glad — would lie and be hypocrites ; but I am no hypocrite, thank God ; and if Lady Geith should have a child, I shall always say mine has been cheated out of his inheritance.”

“ But I may be mistaken,” said the companion, by way of consolation ; “ and, besides, even if I am not, it may be a girl.”



“And if it be,” retorted Mrs. Geith, “there will be half a dozen sons afterwards;” and she flung herself on a sofa, and cried with rage and disappointment.

“I shall ask Selina,” she said at last. “Don’t talk to me about compromising you. If you wanted the matter kept secret you ought to have held your tongue.”

And with this trite remark Mrs. Arthur dried her eyes, and went off straightway to her sister-in-law, to whom she put her question sharply and suddenly.

Taken by surprise, Lady Geith’s denial was both startled and confused. She was so utterly astounded at Miss Teddesley’s idea, she was so delighted at Mrs. Geith’s evident chagrin, she felt herself placed at once in so different a position to that she had hitherto occupied, that her negative implied an affirmative to the listener’s understanding, and Mrs. Arthur went home mystified, crestfallen, and furious.

Then Miss Teddesley came stealing into Lady Geith’s dressing-room. That she was not supposed to think, was quite a fiction got up for Mrs. Arthur’s benefit, because Miss Teddesley did think to great purpose, and could talk too, for that matter.

Not even Lady Geith hated Mrs. Arthur with the same intensity as Miss Teddesley. Many a slight, many a sneer, which Mrs. Arthur had forgotten, were stored up by the companion, and thought of as debts to be paid.

She was as silent, as wily as a serpent, and she watched her opportunity till she could get in the thin end of a wedge, destined to part Mrs. Arthur and Snareham as a possession forever. It was she who tempted Lady Geith, and with her clear head laid out a scheme for bringing a false heir to Snareham, which scheme was not guessed at by any one save Rose Geith.

“I am as certain of it as I am that I am talking to you,” said she to her husband. “I have not the faintest shadow of a doubt on the subject; but what are we to do, what ought we to do?”

What were they to do, indeed. In blank dismay, the pair, who, though suspicious, had still no proof wherewith to confirm those suspicions, asked each other that question day after day, till the opportunity for doing or proving anything was past, for before the young heir was christened, Adolphus Geith sickened, and while the joy-bells were ringing at Great Snareham, the young wife was left a widow.

It was not in Rose Geith's nature, however, to suspect such a wrong and hold her peace to the doer thereof; so the time arrived when there was a scene between the sisters-in-law, when Lady Geith offered to compensate for the wrong she had done in money, and Rose Geith flung the offer back at her with scorn.

"Keep your money," she retorted. "You will need it all, or I am mistaken, to buy the silence of your accomplices. Neither I nor mine will ever touch a penny of it. I am sinning enough in keeping your secret without that. May God forgive us both, Selina;" and then she went down on her knees, and prayed Lady Geith to confess all to her husband, to Mrs. Arthur Geith, and let the mother, whoever she might be, have back her child.

In vain — all in vain. Lady Geith had gone too far to draw back. She could not humiliate herself to Mrs. Arthur Geith; she could not face the world, her husband, and her friends; and finding all her arguments and entreaties were urged in vain, Rose Geith went back sorrowfully to her home, and never crossed the threshold of Snareham Castle after.

She let her boy go there, but from a child she taught him independence, and made him firm and self-reliant. And on her death-bed, she made him promise never to accept money nor favor beyond the merest courtesies of life from Lady Geith or her son.

"The day may come, George, when you will thank me for exacting that promise. In any case, I know it is well for you to give it."

How faithfully George Geith kept his promise we have seen ; and his aunt thought of that, sitting in the dusk all alone in Halkin Street.

Changes had taken place in the Geith family during the twenty-eight years that had elapsed since her ladyship had forced a fictitious heir into their domestic annals ; but no change, unless, indeed, it might be the death of the husband, had occurred to render Lady Geith's life happier.

So far from the son's advent making matters pleasanter at Snareham Castle, it had simply made them worse. Long before his birth, Lady Geith knew Sir Mark was aware of her deception, and merely winked at it for some purpose of his own. She could never forget, and she as certainly never forgave, the sneer with which the baronet received the intelligence of a possible heir. And yet, when the boy came, he liked him, he caressed him, he was proud of him.

There was something in the way in which the child was greeted and she neglected, which galled Lady Geith beyond endurance, and made her almost detest the lad for whom she had dared and suffered so much.

Just about the time that the young heir was christened, Miss Teddesley married, and went to China with her husband ; but four years afterwards, when the Geiths returned from that foreign tour, during the course of which Lettice Geith was born, Mrs. Lemon came back with them, a widow, who had not been left in good circumstances, it appeared, since she resumed her old post as companion, and devoted herself to Lady Geith with the same assiduity as formerly.

More years passed away, and between sunrise and sunset Mrs. Arthur Geith was left childless. Then Lady Geith stretched forth the right hand of fellowship to her old enemy : all too late. The loss of her children, and the sudden paralysis of her husband, made the unhappy woman almost a maniac. There was no measure in her grief, or in her anger. When she came to Snareham, it was but to reproach Lady Geith, and tell Mark he was an intruder, an interloper, and illegitimate. *And after the baronet's death, when*

Mark absolutely succeeded to the title, she grew rabid, and became so notorious for her slanderous remarks, that people paid no more attention to them than if she had been an inmate of the nearest lunatic asylum.

But Mrs. Geith, though violent, was not mad. She had grasped a truth intuitively; and could she have shown any logical steps by which she had arrived at the conclusion that Lady Geith was somehow, in the matter of the children, criminal, she would have spared neither time nor money to revenge herself on her sister-in-law.

Had she but known it, she was already amply revenged. The deaths of her sons, the paralysis of her husband, would have left George the certain heir of Snareham, providing Mark had not stood in the way. And Lady Geith knew that; saw that, by her own evil act, the man she would have liked best to see master of the old place, was excluded from his rights. Her plans had succeeded so well, that she was punished through them. She had labored to knot the rope that scourged her. She had saddled herself with a son, and with a companion, who were the pests and curses of her daily life; while the rightful presumptive heir of all the vast property was dwelling, Heaven knew where, and living, she could not even guess how.

For her brother-in-law she felt no compunction. At Snareham, or in London, he would still be a poor, paralytic, useless creature, who could not enjoy the property if he had it, and to whom the much-coveted baronetage might never bring back health. But George, the son of the man she had once loved, and of the best friend ever found in woman, it was the thought of him that wrung her heart, and made her path so difficult to travel. Because, if Mark once married and had children, there was an end of George's chance forever. He should not marry. She came round to that decision once again, and was thinking how she might best be able to maintain it, when the door was flung open, and a footman entering with lights, announced at the same moment, —

“Mr. George Geith.”

## CHAPTER XI.

## AUNT AND NEPHEW.

“GEORGE, this is unexpected.”

“I am very glad to see you again, aunt;” and then they talked about the rain, and the cold, and the season, as though they had been meeting every day for the previous twelve-month, till the servant left the room and closed the door behind him.

When he had done so, the two looked at each other long and earnestly — looked words that might never be spoken, inquiries which could never be uttered.

How had the years been passed? What had they brought with them? What of joy, what of sorrow, was clasped within the volume containing a large portion of a life which now lay closed before them? Eight years had made the young man middle-aged, the middle-aged woman old. Lady Geith's hair was gray, her face longer, her figure less erect than when her nephew had seen her last; whilst, as for George, the change in his appearance struck his aunt so forcibly that at last she could refrain no longer, but broke the silence with —

“Where have you been? What have you been doing to yourself all these years?”

“Working — in London,” he answered.

“In London, and yet never came to see me. George, what was it made you leave Morelands? What could induce you to keep us in ignorance of where you were? You have caused me sleepless nights and wretched days,” she

went on ; " could you not have written even one word to say you were alive and well ? "

" I ought to have written," was his reply ; " but at first I thought it better to break off all old connection, everything which could shake my resolution. Afterwards, writing seemed useless. The last thing we learn is to believe that old friends, after years of absence, still think kindly of us."

" You ought never to have doubted me," said Lady Geith, her eyes filling with tears. " If you had been my own son twenty times over, George, I could not have suffered more anxiety on your account. I did not know what to do ; I did not know which way to turn. As I could not imagine why you had left Morelands, I was afraid of taking any step that might compromise you. Advertising, private inquiries, might all have led to " —

" To some other person finding out my whereabouts also," he finished, as she paused and hesitated.

" Yes, nothing but fear, I felt satisfied, could have driven you from Morelands. You had got into some scrape there, and, being too proud to let your friends help you out of it, you fled. Was it not so, George ? "

She asked this anxiously, and her nephew understood in a moment what she wanted him to tell her.

" I had done nothing wrong, aunt," he replied, with a grave smile, which reassured her. " I had done nothing wrong, either at Morelands or elsewhere ; but I was a fool once in my life, and the consequences of my folly pursued me there and harassed me to such an extent that I was forced at last to adopt the course I did."

" But could money not have relieved you ; could your friends — could I — have done nothing in the matter ? " asked Lady Geith.

" Money might have done something, — death has," he answered, drawing his breath as he spoke, like a man who lays down a heavy burden which he has carried far and fast.

“And you have nothing now to fear from any one?”

“Nothing; a single grave is long enough and deep enough to hold what caused misery to me.”

“You wish to tell me nothing more about your trouble?” she said, inquiringly.

For a minute he was tempted to tell her the whole story; but he put the temptation aside, remembering that confidence, even to the truest and dearest, usually proves an expensive luxury; and thinking of the old saying, which affirms “that three people can keep a secret if two are away.”

Not even for private circulation had George the slightest intention of printing off his folly; for, if once he printed it at all, who could tell where chance and accident, and evil fortune, might not bear the telltale sheets. He trusted his aunt, certainly, but still it was better to trust no one; and so he answered, —

“I would rather not tell you more about it. It is not pleasant to dig down into the past only to dig up skeletons, and I am sure all you really want to be certain about is that I did no wrong, and that I am free.”

“Thank God for it!” said Lady Geith, earnestly; “but George, ‘free’ is a strong word to use.”

“Not too strong, though,” he replied; “a man does not leave his home, forsake his profession, and cast himself adrift from all his relations, without a sufficient reason. There is a worse captivity than any prison can know within four stone walls. I have felt it, and am competent to speak.”

And was not she? As he finished, she bowed her head in her hands; for the echo his words woke in her soul deafened her. Was not she? Good Heavens! what prisoner ever endured a worse captivity? Could chains and bars, and bolts and locks have ever bound her so fast as the consequences of her own sin had done?

If George Geith had sinned likewise, had he confessed to any crime, had he told a tale of temptation yielded to, of wrong committed, his aunt might then have told her story

to him, and flung herself at once on his sympathy, his generosity, and his mercy. But to a man who declared he had been only sinned against, how could a sinner speak? And so the opportunity drifted away down the river of time, and the secret of each was still preserved intact.

"Though you do not like talking about the past," said Lady Geith, after a pause, "I suppose you have no objection to tell me your future plans. You will return to the Church, I hope. Great Snareham is not yet vacant, certainly, but there are other livings to be had, and" —

"I shall never reënter the Church, aunt," he interrupted. "I left it unwillingly; but I know now that I am not fit to be a clergyman, that, as years went on, I should have wearied of the life, and become dissatisfied with my position. Business is the only really productive field of labor for a poor and pushing man. It is all very well to talk of family influence and good connections. Would any influence have given me my present income, and still left me my independence?"

"I do not know," she answered; "you have not told me what your income is, nor the nature of the business in which you are engaged."

Then George Geith repeated the story which you, my readers, have heard before, of his struggles and his success.

Forgetting the weary drudgery, the mortification, the long-protracted suspense which make the earlier parts of a business life so hard to pass through; forgetting all the prejudices of society against trade, all old bugbears of gentility, all the ideas in which he had been born and bred up, and only feeling how great and grand a thing it is to have fought the battle of poverty single-handed, to have risen unaided and unpatronized, George Geith grew eloquent, and told the tale of years gone by in words that commanded the interest of his listener.

Would to God I could make the details of business as interesting to my readers. I would I could show to men of



pleasure and to men of rank what trade really is ; what an excitement, what a pain, what a struggle, and when honestly and honorably carried out, what a glory too. Every other class — the high, the low, the barrister, the student, the author, the peer and the peasant, the factory hand, and the cotton lord — has found some writer to tell its tale ; but I can remember no book which has ever described a shopkeeper as a man, or ventured into the debatable middle land, where talent and energy is struggling from morning to night in dingy offices, in dark warehouses, unknown in the world's eye, solely because business has never yet learnt to be self-conscious, — because it is in its very nature to work rather than to think, to push forward to the goal rather than to analyze the reasons which induce it to push forward at all.

And it is just this which makes business uninteresting to outsiders. As a rule, a tradesman cannot talk of himself. He speaks of markets, of failures, of losses, of successes ; but he cannot, or will not, reveal how these things affected his own feelings and thoughts. The rich can make quite a volume of sentiment out of the merest trifles. The poor are glib enough and pathetic enough concerning their stomachs and a fall in wages. The woes of governesses are drugs in the markets. The trials of sensitive men who cannot make sixpence a year, have been depicted till even young ladies are weary of making heroes of them. Gold-diggers, emigrants, hunters, explorers, all find words with which to interest the public ear. It is only trade, only that which is the backbone of England, only that which furnishes heir-esses for younger sons ; only that which sends forth fleets of merchantmen, and brings home the products of all countries ; only that which feeds the poor, and educates the middle classes, and keeps the nobility of the land from sinking to the same low level as the nobility of all other lands has done ; it is only this, I say, which can find no writer worthy of it, nor one who does not jeer at business and treat with contempt that which is holy in God's sight, because it is useful,

and proves beneficial to millions and millions of His creatures.

George Geith, however, was not ashamed of the calling that brought him bread ; and his previous education, and the association of earlier years, furnished him with words in which to state the story of the past seven years ; how he had come to London friendless, and had since gained a connection ; how he had mastered all the details of his business ; how he had slaved as a clerk ; how he had struggled as a beginner on his own account ; how he was now comparatively well-to-do, an independent man, with every prospect of doing better and better as the years rolled on ; — the first younger son of the Geiths who had ever before bettered his condition save by marriage or inheritance.

And Lady Geith listened. She who had wronged this man, listened and thanked God ; for she felt that, in the mysterious course of God's providence, good would come out of evil, and that George Geith was a better and a happier man, laboring in the city, which was a *terra incognita* unto her, than he could possibly be waiting for Sir Arthur Geith's death, sighing away his life till his uncle's shoes should drop from his cold feet, and come to be possessed by him.

She had seen enough of what is called pleasure likewise to be aware its day is not all sunshine, and to be dimly conscious that there is a something higher in life than pleasure, namely, work ; consequently she made no lament concerning the disgrace which would follow on the Geiths by one of them having soiled his fingers by touching trade ; nay, rather, she told her nephew how proud she was of him, and how she wished that such a son had been given unto her.

Then came George's opportunity. " I think, aunt," he said, " you have every cause to be proud of the son you possess. I do not know where you would find a handsomer, or franker, or more generous fellow than Mark ;" and the accountant, all unconscious of the stab he was giving, turned towards the woman who had chosen a child at random to

pass off as her own, and found, when it was too late, she had chosen nothing strong, nor great, nor clever, but only a person very like his most ordinary neighbors, of whom his best friend could find little to say in his praise, save even that he was "handsome, and frank, and generous."

What commendation! Why even a drivelling fool might have been so described without any breach of truth.

"You have seen him lately?" asked Lady Geith.

"This morning," George answered. "I slept last night at Castle Snareham."

"And you come here from him? on his behalf, I mean," added Lady Geith.

"I come here, first, to see you," answered George, "and in the second place, to talk about Mark. He is very unhappy, aunt. He stands in a most uncomfortable position."

"It was his own free choice getting into it," said Lady Geith, coldly.

"That probably does not add to his comfort," replied her nephew, "and really in the matter which is the principal cause of disagreement between you, I do not think Mark much to blame. It is indeed rather to his credit to have chosen a portionless girl. Would you not rather see him marry for love than marry for money?"

"I would rather not see him marry at all," retorted her ladyship, with such sharp suddenness that her tone struck George mute. "And what is more," she went on, "if I can prevent it he shall not marry, either."

"Do you mean to say," asked her nephew, "that you want him to remain single all his life; that you wish to see no wife at Snareham, no heir to all that fine estate?"

"I do," she answered; "wives have been the curses of the Geiths; and as for sons, what son has ever succeeded his father in this most wretched family?"

"Mark," was George's reply to this question; and as he spoke, Lady Geith rose and walked up and down the room, pressing her hands to her temples as she went.

"True," she said at last, "and I wish he had never succeeded. I wish in this case any one — Arthur Geith, you, or even a stranger — were now at Snareham in his stead. He would be happier working as you have done; he would be better without his title, without his properties. What has been his life since he came into possession? Who have been his companions; what his pursuits? Did he tell you how he has wasted his substance; how he has gambled; how he has lost on horses; how he has hampered himself with debts that he can never pay off in his lifetime; and how, with as fine an estate as any of its class in England, he is yet very little better than a beggar?"

"But, aunt, consider how he was brought up," urged George. "Was there anything he wanted his father did not let him have? Was he ever taught the value of money? Was he ever shown that property has its responsibilities as well as its advantages? that a man, even if he be a baronet, is scarcely free to do just what he likes with his own? I do not think Mark is to blame for not practising what he never learnt."

"What I ought to have taught him, I suppose, you mean," remarked Lady Geith.

"What some one ought, most certainly," answered her nephew, boldly. "His father, at any rate. Mark has, however, now learnt dearly what might have been taught him once cheaply; and it seems to me there is no use in blaming him for past errors, if he be willing to reform in the future. Surely marriage ought to make him more careful, for he would then have another's interests to consider as well as his own."

"I have told you I will not have him marry," repeated Lady Geith.

"You must pardon me, aunt, for saying that no human being has a right to prevent a man marrying if he choose."

"Let him marry then," retorted Lady Geith. "Though I do not wish him to marry, though I believe he will bring

misery on himself if he do marry, I shall not attempt to prevent his doing so."

"But he cannot marry without your help," said the accountant.

"Which I am not bound to give," was the lady's decided reply.

"Then, virtually, you are determined that he shall never have wife, nor child, nor home worthy the name," observed George, after a short silence.

"He has determined that for himself by his own conduct," said Lady Geith; "by his extravagance and by his folly; for a man in his position to fall in love with a penniless girl is absurd."

"Then you would like him to marry for money?" questioned George.

"I would like him to face his affairs, to retrench, to rely on himself for once. Do you know what his debts are, George?" she asked suddenly; "how much he has to live on after paying life insurance, and interest, and so forth?"

"I have not the faintest idea," replied her nephew.

"Something under fifteen hundred a year," she answered. "A fine income that on which to marry and keep up Snareham and a town-house. He wants me to help him clear the property, but I cannot and will not do anything of the kind. It is unreasonable to expect it. You see yourself I should be made to risk my fortune in such a way; for he would never continue to pay his life insurance were I his creditor. He would only go and contract fresh debts, and live more extravagantly than ever."

She was certainly throwing new light on the subject. George's business head saw at once what Mark could never have been made to comprehend, viz., that, if Lady Geith cleared Snareham with her own money, she would certainly want bread before she died; and as he could urge no course upon her tending to such a result, he broke new ground, and remarked, —

"At any rate, aunt, you might receive Miss Hayles, and see what you think of her."

"To what purpose?" asked her ladyship, who had by this time resumed her seat and her composure. "I should be raising false hopes, and giving my countenance to a match which cannot take place. Mark must give up the girl."

"He has gone too far to be able to do anything of the kind," answered George, a little impatiently. "And if you were to see Miss Hayles, I do not think you would marvel at his claim."

"Were she as beautiful as Venus, and as fascinating as a syren, it could make no difference to me," returned his aunt. "I shall not help Mark to entangle himself further."

"Still, aunt, if you will not see Miss Hayles, will you not be reconciled to Mark? He is very unhappy about the unfortunate differences that have parted you; he is very sorry for his conduct. For my sake, aunt, will you let him come here and speak for himself. It is the first great request I have ever made to you. Will you grant it?"

"Yes; if you will grant me one in return," said Lady Geith, after a moment's pause: "if you will come to me for what money you may require in your business, either a gift or loan. I shall not refuse to forgive Mark some actions which, however, I can never forget. Name what sum you like, one thousand or ten, and you shall have it to-morrow before two o'clock."

My reader, my dear business reader, listen to this offer, and think what a temptation it must have proved to George Geith, so invidiously proffered, too, as loan or gift; as loan, which, if prosperous and proud, he could repay; as gift, which, if he failed, need never trouble his memory more.

Ten thousand pounds! see you not at the words — warehouses stocked, ships freighted, shops filled; knowing what you have done with your poor little capital, with your mere bagatelle of four or five hundred sovereigns? Does not the bare idea of this wealth bring visions of greatness before

multiplying, extending, rarifying? What could you do with ten thousand pounds? — take that first-rate place, the premium asked for which, and the long rent at the back of that, puts it out of your power to do more than think of it now?

You might take it, and advertise freely, and purchase largely, and employ efficient clerks. Great Mammon! what might not you do with ten thousand pounds? — and here is a man who can refuse such an offer.

Not for the reason he assigns to Lady Geith that he does not want it; not because he is blind to the power money can give, to earn so apparently ready cash, a profession as that of an accountant; but simply because of an old, old promise, made to one whose hand will never clasp his again, whose eyes may never welcome him home more.

Ease, competence, wealth, perhaps, as great as Mark's, he saw might be compassed by means of the sum thus offered, but he refused gently and gratefully, so gratefully that Lady Geith's heart was wrung.

"You thank me now, George," she said, constrained to speak by an impulse she could not control. "You thank me now, George. I wonder if the day will ever come when you will curse me as the worst enemy you ever knew."

"I shall never do that, aunt, rest assured," George replied, "even though you should prove my enemy in the future; though why you should, passes my comprehension. I shall not forget your kindnesses in the past. But now about Mark," he added; "you will see him. I will write and tell him that I have mediated successfully, so far."

"Yes, I will see him;" she said it wearily; "understand me clearly, though, George, and make him understand me too. I will see Mark, but I will not assist him; I will not commit an injustice towards another for the sake of helping a man who cannot help himself."

"If you are thinking of me," answered George, who had been waiting to get in this protest all through the interview, "I can only say I have no right nor title to expect anything

from you, and that if you made over the whole of your fortune to me to-morrow, I should not touch a penny of it."

"Yes, George, you would," she said, laying her hand on his arm; "for if I left my money to you I should leave you likewise my reasons for doing so, and in that case your promise to your mother would bind you no longer, for even she would not have objected to your taking atonement from sinners after confession."

Now what could a man say to such a speech as this, more especially such a man as George Geith? Nothing; and accordingly that was what he did say, pressing her hand at the same time in token of farewell.

"So you will not stay for dinner; you are weary of old friends already, and want to run away," she pleaded.

"I will come some other time," he answered, "when Maria is here, if you give me leave to do so;" and with that promise he departed, and wended his way from the west to the east, — from Piccadilly, gay with lights and carriages, to the darkness of Fen Court, where the trees kept sobbing and moaning over the graves.



## CHAPTER XII.

## OFFICE VISITORS.

THE months went by, spring succeeded to winter, summer to spring, and still George Geith was in Fen Court, doing well.

Save increase of business, time had brought no changes to him worth chronicling. At intervals he had visited his aunt; at intervals, likewise, he had seen Mark, between whom and his mother a fresh disagreement had arisen soon after Easter, which accelerated Lady Geith's journey to the Continent, and caused Sir Mark's final retirement to Snareham Castle, to fell his timber and think over his debts.

The accountant had done some business for his cousin during the winter; showed him clearly how he stood, and how, by changing his mortgagees, he might effect a considerable annual saving in interest, which, as George wisely remarked, "might be devoted to paying off the principal." In fact, what with the timber which the property could well spare, savings in interest, and strict economy in personal expenditure, the accountant considered that the estate might be completely cleared in ten years; and in this view the baronet had at one time cordially agreed. But after the second disagreement with his mother, Sir Mark's tone changed. Despairing of help from her, the prospect of ten years of economy frightened this spoiled child of fortune.

"I should not care for work," he said. "Hang it! George, take me into partnership and let me make enough

to clear off this damned mortgage. Five or six thousand pounds ought to turn in thirty thousand in no time."

But George shook his head. He knew well enough where a business would soon be that Mark Geith had any say to.

"Well, use five or six thousand, and give me half profits," said the baronet, who was very much in earnest about the matter.

"There is such a thing in business as losing as well as using," observed his cousin.

"Let us try, at any rate. I should not care about losing," persisted Sir Mark.

"But I should," answered George; and as he said this, his mind travelled back over years and years, over the difficulties he had vanquished, the weary lessons he had conned, the hills he had climbed, the long, long road he had traversed solitary and unaided. Given, two men talking on any subject, and how hard, my reader, it is for the one to imagine what mental picture the conversation presents for the contemplation of the other.

What is it that the eyes, turning towards the past, behold? what is it that the speaker is really thinking about, whilst he talks glibly enough of the matter in hand? His fellow may never know that; for the great dramas of life are acted out by every man and woman among us, with no spectator but One above. In its sin, in its sorrow, in its despair, in its misery, its patient endurance, and its frantic struggle, humanity is lonely beyond all power of expression.

When the thorns have entered, when the brambles have torn, when the path has been roughest, when the purpose has faltered, when tears of bitterness have been shed, when hands have been clasped most tenderly, when words of farewell have been spoken, when the poor tired pilgrim has lain down in mortal agony, and sobbed out his despair, who may tell but God?

And if you could only believe this, my reader; if you

could only feel that the most commonplace man you meet has acted out in his own way some tragedy, on which his Maker and yours has looked with interest, I think it would make you more patient towards those who are neither clever nor attentive; more tolerant to all sorts and conditions of men; more pitiful to those who may, for aught you know, have suffered more than the Almighty will ever permit you to suffer; and more indulgent towards those writers who choose their heroes from amongst the men who pass you by in the street, who crowd railway stations, who live plainly and have no story to tell about themselves, though they may have fought battles and faced dangers, and passed through troubles that have made them strong in the sight of God.

Weary and long was the road George Geith had travelled in order to reach comparative success. Looking back, he could not but shudder at the light way in which Mark spoke of losing a game which was bread and meat and clothing to himself. If Sir Mark had known anything of work, anything of business, loss and success would not have seemed a new game of pitch and toss with fortune.

The more money he made, the larger his commission grew; the higher the stake he was playing for, the more cautious George Geith became in business, the more earnestly he buckled to his work; and he would just as soon have thought of intrusting the management of his affairs to a lunatic as of suffering his cousin to have any voice in the disposal of his profits, any finger in the business-pie. He knew, if he did, Sir Mark would soon have out all the plums; and for this reason, if for no other, he resolutely declined all the baronet's proposals; which, though at first made jestingly, came in the end to be spoken in serious earnest by the younger man.

The natural result followed, and by degrees Sir Mark fought his way to Fen Court, and fought likewise to ask his cousin so frequently to Snareham.

"I know what he is doing," thought the accountant, look-

ing out on the trees before his window, which were now green and leafy with the early summer foliage; "I know what he is doing: he is cutting off the entail."

And the accountant was right. Sir Mark Geith was cutting off the entail, and George could not raise a finger to prevent him.

Thus the man who dwelt in the city, and who labored there, found himself, for the second time in his life, quite alone. But as it is one thing for a person to leave his friends, and quite another for his friends to leave him, George Geith felt more lonely now than he had done in the old days when he was Gregory Grant, struggling for liberty, struggling for bread.

He saw that he might live the life of dependence and pleasure, or the life of independence and business, but that he could not combine business and pleasure; and in a dim kind of way he began to understand what puzzles most people till they have dwelt in the Castle of Indolence, and scrambled for daily bread in the hard fields of labor; this is why so broad a line of demarcation separates the two classes; why pleasure cannot mix with business, and business scowls at pleasure.

Now socially came the time of danger for this busy man; now with Snareham fading from his view, with the old door closed against him, came an hour when George Geith asked himself whether — seeing man cannot forever live alone — he had not better make the best of his business connection, and seek his future acquaintances amongst those who were travelling the same road as himself.

If the one hand held no welcome for him, why should he not turn his face to the other? He had chosen: he was of business — busy. Let him greet those whose leisure moments were rare also! He was of the city — cityish. Why should he not make friends of those who passed their days under the shadow of the dragon and the grasshopper; and swear allegiance to the magnates of Cockaigne?

Here was a point where cross-roads met ; along which would he turn ? Would he take business for his end, Mammon for his god ; a wife with a little money, and a great deal of vulgarity, for his helpmate, and her connections for his for evermore ? Or should he use business as a means, worship Mammon, but moderately, and either live single all his life-long, or wait for such a wife as he would have chosen in the old days gone by ?

Which would he select : a life with something in it beside the city and the three per cent.s, or an existence like that of hundreds of business-men, who are sufficiently well off to be uninteresting, and so thoroughly content and self-satisfied, that the most daring of authors would never venture to put them in a book ?

Would he turn at this point, or go on straight as hitherto : which ? We shall see.

Had the men he met been the same at home as they were in their offices ; had the women who were wives and daughters to the city folks, with whom he was brought in contact, been anything like as presentable as their husbands and brothers, George Geith might have rested where he was forever ; but as it was, so it was. Every prejudice, every taste, every feeling of the man rose up in wrath against the manners and habits of the people, who asked him to come and be one with them ; and he drew himself further back into his shell, refusing to be lured forth by such wiles as theirs. He would not run down to Brighton from Saturday till Monday. He could not spare time to visit Hastings ; he dined once or twice at suburban houses, where the material silver was very good, but where the manners of his hosts and hostesses were only very lightly plated with civil electrottype. He was very shy of the Bemmidges' hospitality, and cleverly fenced off Mrs. Bemmidge's invitations for him to join their party to the theatre, or the opera, and to the Zoölogical Gardens. She had got some tickets from a shareholder for Sunday admission, and she wanted Mr

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ith to hear the band ; but Mr. Geith declined. He was gaged for the day, he said ; and so he was. At St. Helen's church in the morning, and in Fen Court and on the Lower wharf in the afternoon.

It was a mighty lonely existence, and there are few who would not have sunk in its action to something worse.

There was one habit Mrs. Bemmidge had contracted, since that unhappy Christmas dinner, which the accountant could not endure, viz., that of coming to his office to press her invitations in person.

She had him at a disadvantage there. She was a woman, and he could not ask her to go out ; and very often it was evident she would not go until she carried her point. Moreover, she could answer his objections and bear down his excuses. Altogether it was a proceeding George detested. Had she come on business, with a set of books to balance, an estate to be wound up, a schedule to be prepared, or even her housekeeping bills to be examined and added up, George would have forgiven her ; but to bring her petticoats, and not only her own petticoats, but those of her mother and sister, into his office, to scatter his papers, to ask to sit down, if he was out ; to take possession of his chair, and walk up and down that sacred inner office, as though the fact of her sex gave her title-deeds of his possession, the practice was unendurable, objectionable in the extreme.

In the first place, it was very inconvenient ; in the second, it did not look well ; and George Geith thought a man in business ought to be more careful about appearances than even Cæsar's wife.

Under the infliction he chafed, and, though he had been a clergyman, swore.

"What the deuce does the woman mean by it," he thought ; "I wonder Bemmidge allows her. If I were married, I would not suffer my wife to enter my office, let alone go into any other man's. It is not only a confounded nuisance, but it is also improper."

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Which very likely it seemed to him, though it did not to the lady, who was only, in her own eyes, doing her duty both by Mr. Geith and her sister. She wanted to get the one settled, and the other out into a little pleasant society ; and, as he would not come to the mountain, why, there was nothing for it but for the mountain to go to him.

Whereupon she often penetrated to Fen Court, and many and many a time compelled him to accept her invitation in order to get rid of her. Had the accountant been a weak man, he would have married Miss Gilling to get rid of the family ; but he was strong and not over-sensitive, for which reason he finally gave orders to Mr. Foss, always to tell Mrs. Bembridge he was engaged.

“ No matter what I am doing, I shall be busy the whole day ; and if I am out, you don't expect me in at all, remember.”

“ Yes, sir. And Mr. Bembridge ? ”

“ I shall see him, unless Mrs. Bembridge, or Miss Gilling be with him ; but I cannot, and will not, be pestered with women, unless they come on business.”

“ Pestered with women,” that was the way this man spoke of the sex for which Mr. Foss had an unbounded reverence. If he had had an office, and Miss Gilling had come there with a friend, what would he not have done for her ?

He would have let business go to the dogs ; he would have stirred the fire in the winter ; opened the window in summer ; gone away with her for the afternoon ; accepted her sister's invitation with rapture.

As it was, he could but obey the instructions of his principal in the office, and, in the course of a walk towards Crouch End, with Miss Gilling, suffer that young lady to pump the order he had received, out of him. Afterwards Mr. Foss could have bitten a piece off his tongue for the indiscretion, but that would have done no good ; and Miss Gilling was so kind as to take no notice of his words.

But she stored the grievance up, and nursed what she

considered the insult offered to her, even while she still went to Fen Court with her sister, and took chance of finding Mr. Geith at home.

He was at home, and busy, one summer's afternoon when Mrs. Bembridge tapped at his door.

His clerks were both out, the one at the West and the other at the Bank, so that he had to answer the summons himself, after which there was, of course, no retreat.

"So we have caught you at last," said Mrs. Bembridge, as she sailed into the room in all the glory of a figured peach barège, a light shawl, and a pink bonnet. Miss Gilling, cool and heavenly, in a straw bonnet trimmed with primrose-colored ribbon, a black scarf, and a blue muslin dress. Mamma's queen accompanied the pair, perhaps as a duenna, and at once took off her head-gear, to Mr. Geith's immense dismay.

"Oh! ma, ain't it 'ot in here?" said the sweet child; and hot it certainly was, with not a window open, and the sun shining with all its might against the glass.

"It is very warm," acquiesced mamma; and she sat down and fanned herself with the *Times* newspaper.

"I cannot offer to open the windows," remarked Mr. Geith with a grim feeling of satisfaction, "for there is a breeze, and the letters get blown about in all directions."

"I am sure it is no wonder you are ill," said Mrs. Bembridge, "sitting writing in this close room from morning till night."

"You are very kind, but I am not ill," answered George, who was leaning against his desk.

"It is of no use your telling me that," observed Mrs. Bembridge, as though she were gifted with some special power of divination; "any one can tell you are ill by looking in your face. I declare I should scarcely know you since last Christmas; you will have a serious illness, mark my words, Mr. Geith, if you are so careless of your health; Mr. Bembridge has been quite unhappy about you lately. He says



you are killing yourself by inches. It was only last night he was lamenting you would not go out of town. Was not it ? ”

Miss Gilling confirmed her sister's statement. It was a peculiarity of this pair, as it seems to be of many, that the one never appeared to think her statement would be credited unless the other swore to its truth.

“ My brother-in-law,” said Miss Gilling, modestly, “ talks about you every night.”

“ I am extremely obliged to Mr. Bemmidge,” said George, thinking at the same time how short that gentleman must be of interesting subjects of conversation.

“ And he was saying,” went on Mrs. Bemmidge, “ that if you would come and stop with us for a week or two the change of air might do you good. We are almost in the country ; and at any rate it would be better for you than this hot, stifling oven.”

Having finished which neat little speech, Mrs. Bemmidge laid down the *Times* and untied her bonnet-strings.

“ You really are too kind,” answered the accountant ; “ I am not worth all the trouble you take in my behalf ; and besides,” he added, “ I really am not ill. I am perfectly well, and the heat of this place does not affect me as it seems to do you ; on the contrary, I am perfectly cool and comfortable ; ” and Mr. Geith, standing in the full glare of the afternoon sun, made this statement with self-possession and composure.

“ Well, if you are cool here,” said Mrs. Bemmidge, “ I don't think you would be too warm in Calcutta.”

“ I don't think I should,” replied George ; and he laughed as he said it.

“ But whether you feel the closeness of this place or not,” persisted Mrs. Bemmidge, “ it must affect your health. What with the smoke and the heat, and the want of ventilation ” ——

“ Pray be just, Mrs. Bemmidge,” interrupted George,

“there is Billiter Square on the east, the church-yard on the west: two lungs, two large, open spaces; what more would you have?”

“A church-yard prison!” exclaimed Mrs. Bemmidge. “Breathing one’s father and mother, as Mr. Bemmidge says.”

“I believe,” observed Mr. Geith, mildly, “that Fen church-yard was closed before my father and mother were in existence.”

“Really, Mr. Geith, you are as hard to persuade as — as” —

“As men are generally,” he supplied.

“As a woman, papa tells mamma,” broke in Mrs. Bemmidge’s queen, who had been amusing herself with sketching a house on the back of a carefully prepared balance-sheet, and drew by her remark attention to her employment.

“Gracious, child! what have you done?” exclaimed Mrs. Bemmidge, as George snatched the paper from before her and placed it on his desk, with an expression on his face which was not pleasant. “I hope she has done no harm. I declare, miss, you shall never come out with me again. You naughty girl, how many times am I to tell you never to touch anything without permission?” and therewith, full of virtuous indignation, mamma, regardless alike of loosened bonnet and unfastened shawl, arose and shook her queen, who lifted up her voice and wept.

“Oh! for Heaven’s sake, Mrs. Bemmidge, don’t let her cry here,” entreated the accountant. “Do be quiet, child, there is some one coming up the stairs.”

To George’s intense relief it was only the postman; but the incident decided him to get rid of Mrs. Bemmidge at any cost. To have a child (a devil he mentally called it) shrieking in his office, to have punishment, however necessary and satisfactory, inflicted in his own private sanctum within ear-shot of all other men who carried on business in the house! — the thing was unendurable; and if quiet

was only to be purchased by more frequent visits to Ivy Cottage, why to Ivy Cottage he would go. Short of insulting Mr. Bemmidge and quarrelling with the whole connection, the accountant saw no other way out of the maze he had unhappily got into, — and quarrelling was against his creed. He never knew where an enemy might do him harm, nor when a friend might benefit him.

By this time Mrs. Bemmidge had readjusted her bonnet, and, with Miss Gilling's help, got on her shawl; she had also recovered sufficient breath to apologize to Mr. Geith, for her queen's misdeeds, and to hope the mischief she had done was not irreparable.

"I shall have to copy it out again, but that will not take very long," said the accountant, somewhat ruefully. "The child did not know she was doing any harm, so I hope you will say no more to her about it."

"I trust she will be grateful for your kindness, and prove it by behaving better another time." Mr. Geith groaned inwardly. "I am sure I am obliged to you for taking it so well. And now will you not come to us? You shall have breakfast whatever hour you like in the morning; you shall come and go just as you choose; Mr. Bemmidge will be so delighted; and I really think the change of air would be of immense benefit to you."

"I am sorry to say, Mrs. Bemmidge, it is impossible," answered George; "I have to work here sometimes up to two and three o'clock in the morning; I never can tell from one day to another how much leisure I shall have, or whether I shall have any. I cannot go to stay with you; but if you will allow me to take tea with you some evening."

"Allow you!" broke in Mrs. Bemmidge, "when you know we shall be only too glad to see you. But some evening is no evening; when will you come, Mr. Geith."

"I think I can spend an hour or two to-morrow," he answered; "if anything prevents my going, I will call round in Birchin Lane."

“But you will not let anything prevent you; you will come if you can?”

“I will indeed, thank you;” and George bowed the trio out, and then, inwardly fuming, returned to his desk. Though he had told Mrs. Bembridge he was cool, the heat of his room almost suffocated him, and so, after lifting the letter just brought in, he retired into his back office, where, flinging down the window and leaning out to drink the cool breeze, as a thirsty man might water, he read the following epistle, which, though proceeding ostensibly from Mr. Molozane, was written by a lady:—

“Dower House, Molozane Park,  
“Witherfell, near Wattisbridge,  
“June 25th, 1848.

“DEAR SIR:— Long and severe illness has prevented my seeing you since my return from Cornwall.

“I now write to say that the affairs of the Sythlow Mining Co. have assumed such an aspect as to necessitate immediate attention to my own. As you anticipated, I find I shall require help in this arrangement, and I should therefore feel obliged if you would come down here at your earliest convenience, the state of my health rendering it impossible for me to visit London for the present. As we are seven miles from a station I must beg you to name a day and train most suitable to yourself, and I will have a conveyance to meet you at the St. Margaret’s station on the Eastern Counties line.— I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

“A. A. MOLOZANE.”

George Geith read this letter over twice, then, still leaning out of the window, he thought over his engagements for the week, and concluded that if he were to go to Wattisbridge at all, he could not choose a better day than the morrow. If he did go, he should get rid of Mrs. Bembridge’s invitation; get rid at once of her and Miss Gilling and the

children, baby included, whom he detested. Moreover, he would probably have a fine day for his journey, and he should get a glimpse of the country, breathe perfectly pure air, not city, not suburban, but perfectly pure sweet air, among fields in which the mowers were busy. He would go; and, having arrived at this decision, Mr. Geith returned to his desk, when, after first duly consulting Bradshaw, he wrote to Mr. Molozane, informing him that he would next day be at St. Margaret's by the train which was due there at 2.55.

He then finished his other letters, and, when his clerk returned, put on his hat and went down to Abchurch Lane to tell Mr. Bemmidge he was unexpectedly called out of town, and should consequently be unable to fulfil his engagement for the following evening.

"I am glad you are going out of town, even though we shall not see you," said Andrew Bemmidge, as he shook the accountant's hand. "What part of the world are you bound for?"

"Hertfordshire," was Mr. Geith's wide answer.

"Oh! a sweet country, more particularly about Watford and Bushy; — good day. I hope you will enjoy yourself."

"I am going on business," said George, "and there is never much enjoyment to be had out of that."

"Faith, I don't know," answered Mr. Bemmidge, "one would think you must find some fun in business or you would not stick so close to it."

"I am sticking close now, that I may rest hereafter," was the reply.

"That's all stuff," said the wine-merchant. "I dare say you think at present you will rest in the future, but I know better; I know men like you work, work, work, till they die or go mad."

"Delightful prospect," observed the accountant; and as he walked away he thought how little Mr. Bemmidge really knew about him.

Rather, however, was it not George Geith who knew nothing really about himself? in time as well as in eternity is it not true that what men are they remain? Are not the lazy, lazy still, — the untruthful, liars always; and does not the man who works hard at thirty generally continue to work so long as his arm retains its strength, and his right hand her cunning?

## CHAPTER XIII.

## IN THE COUNTRY.

LEAVING the train at St. Margaret's, Mr. Geith looked around for the conveyance Mr. Molozane had mentioned would be awaiting his arrival; but as there was nothing of the kind at the station, — not even a light cart, — the accountant concluded either that his letter had miscarried, or that his notice was too short to enable the unfortunate holder of shares in the Sythlow Mining Co. to fulfil his promise.

Assuredly there was no vehicle of any sort waiting to convey him to Molozane Park, and accordingly the accountant had to decide which of three courses he should pursue, viz., whether he should return to town, wait at St. Margaret's till some one appeared on behalf of Mr. Molozane, or proceed to his destination as best he could.

"It is seven miles to Withefell, is it not?" he asked of a porter when he had satisfied himself there was no one to meet him.

"A good seven miles, sir, by the road to ride; but if you mean to walk, there is a footpath turns off to the right after you get through Wattisbridge, which cuts off a corner and makes the distance not more than four or four and a half miles."

"What is Wattisbridge — a town?"

"No, sir; just a bit of a village, with a few houses round the green, and a tavern and two or three shops."

"And Withefell?"

"Withefell is nothing but a row of small cottages. If it was not for the Hall, there would be no Withefell at all."

“What hall do you mean?”

“Withefell Hall, sir, where Lord Austin used to live. It's a Mr. Finch has it now. It lay vacant for many and many a year. I can remember it well, for I was born and brought up at Wattisbridge.”

“Do you know Molozane Park?” asked Mr. Geith.

“Yes; it is on the other side of Withefell, a full half mile beyond it; Mr. Wern lives there. He will be out by the next train.”

“I thought Mr. Molozane lived at the Park?”

“No, sir — not now. He has left it these three years; I suppose he's gone to the Dower House, as it is called, which stands on the side of the property nearest Withefell. The Park belongs to Mr. Molozane, and Mr. Wern rents it of him.”

“And is the path you mentioned my nearest way to the Dower House?”

“Yes, sir; keep straight on for about a mile till you come to a road to your left hand, which takes you through the wood over Hertford Heath. Then across the common, and never turn till you get to Wattisbridge. If you take the first field-path to your right after you get through Wattisbridge, it will bring you out nearly opposite Mr. Molozane's.”

“Is there any hotel at Wattisbridge — any place I could stay at for the night, if I cannot get back here?”

“There is a very good tavern, sir, the ‘Greyhound.’ It is not exactly an hotel, but it is a very good wayside inn. Mr. Elsenham stops there when he is not at the Dower House; and his groom and horses always stay at the ‘Greyhound.’”

“And who may Mr. Elsenham be?” asked George.

“Mr. Molozane's nephew. He is down here six months out of the twelve. Should you like your bag sent over to Wattisbridge, sir? I can get it taken, if you please.”

Of course George pleased. He was only too glad to be rid of it; and accordingly, after duly seeing the porter, both



for his information and his services, he started, in the full blaze of the afternoon sun, on his way to Withefell.

Over the little hill, due west, he went, and then along a road bordered by limes and elms, and nut-trees, between which he caught glimpses of a country fair and rich and undulating. It was so hot that a purple mist seemed to reflect the distant parts of the landscape. There was a strange calm in everything round and about him. No breeze stirred among the trees; the birds were not singing; the cattle were lying in shady corners of the fields. The mowers seemed to have finished their work, for the grass was down, and the hay in ricks. The dust lay thick on the roads, but there was no wind to stir it. Scarcely a vehicle passed by George Geith as he wended his way along. He could not walk fast, the heat was too intense for that; but as he paced along slowly, looking at the country through which he passed, he felt it a very blessed thing to get out of London even for a few hours, to be greeted and caressed and kissed by nature, who was decked out in such glorious apparel, to receive her prodigal. He had not been so far out of town in the summer time for years; he had almost forgotten what the country was like in summer, till he came to see it now with its hedgerows festooned with roses; its trailing brambles twined with honey-suckle; its banks softly cushioned with moss; its fields stretching far away into the distance; whilst high above all was the calm blue sky, over which floated slowly a few light fleecy clouds.

Dwellers in the country do not know how the sight thereof affects those who dwell in towns. They who have the turf and the fields, and the trees and the flowers always, cannot imagine what sharpened senses gaze every now and then on nature, bask in her loveliness, drink in her perfumes, hearken to her music. To many a citizen, to look on the country in summer is to come fresh on a new creation.

The blades of grass, the hyacinths growing in the woods, the long shadows of the trees lying on the turf beneath, the

call of the blackbird, the song of the thrush, the babbling of tiny brooks, the pebbles at the bottom of some clear rivulet, the white roads winding off to distant villages and hamlets; these things, which, it may be, the countryman never notices, because he is amongst them always, are, to the dwellers in towns, so marvellously beautiful, so unutterably soothing, that he cannot tell his neighbor how they affect him, for even very shallow people sometimes dare not talk about what touches them most; and how that summer landscape touched George Geith, I could scarcely, my reader, be able to explain.

I only know that all that was noble and good and pure in the man's hard nature was brought out by the sight of the country, and the trees, and the grass; never to speak of the stillness, a stillness which he occasionally stopped to hear, if the paradox may be allowed. On he went, on past field and copse and hedgerow, on through the wood and across the common, till at last he came to Wattisbridge, a thoroughly old-fashioned village, where the "Greyhound" hung out its sign under the shadow of two glorious chestnuts, and large red brick houses were scattered round the green.

Away to the left lay the parish church, its square towers showing gray and massive against the trees in the graveyard. Over the gate George leant for a minute, looking at the diamond-paned windows, and the ancient porch, and the head-stones, some white, some moss-grown, on which the summer sun was shining.

Many a year the accountant lived over again as he leant on the gate and looked on the graves before him. Many a memory he had thought dead and buried, too, arose from its coffin and stared him in the face. Pictures of the past came crowding into his mind, filling his gallery full to overflowing. He saw another church, another graveyard, the face of the loved and lost, the hopes and the sorrows of many and many a day departed. He, almost another man as it seemed to him, looked back on what he had been, and conjugated again,

by the light of memory, "to suffer," the only verb he had ever learnt thoroughly. He looked back, another man as I have said, on the being and doing and suffering of his former self; looked back, as such men do, calmly and dispassionately at the trials of that other George Geith whom he had once been.

There was no self-pity, no regret, no pain; but there was recollection, such recollection as will come every now and then even to the hearts of men who work hard and think little.

And with olden memories still overlying the realities of his present existence, he turned aside from the church-yard and pursued his way to Withefell.

If he enjoyed the first portion of his walk, the latter proved more enjoyable still. He was by this time in the field-path which led straight away from Wattisbridge to the Dower House. He trod on the cool grass; he passed close by flocks of sheep. He stood to watch the lambs, who, all tails and legs, scudded away to their mothers at his approach. He passed by shaded ponds where the cattle stood knee-deep in the waters. He rested on this stile and on that, and looked down into the hollows where young plantations were springing up, or off to the far horizon where the purple haze lay heaving on the dark-green trees.

He had come from a place where, as I have before said, time flies; where it is express pace year after year; where we may, indeed, travel the miles of our threescore-year-and-ten pilgrimage, but where those miles seem short and unsatisfactory, because of the pace at which we go. We look at something in the present, and behold, before we can look again, the past has seized it. We throw down the sovereigns that make up the sum of our lives to Time, and as he gathers them he gives us scanty change for the treasures cast away. While the train by which we travel sweeps through life, quiet country nooks, or world-forgotten stations, meet our aching eyes, and we feel it would be pleasant to break the

journey at some of them, and rest a while, even proceeding further towards that mighty terminus where the black coach is waiting our arrival, to bear us into the "silent land."

Great stretches of upland woods lying still and green in the summer's soft evening light, gray mountains reflected from the winter's sky, rivers with mossy banks overshadowed by ancient trees, moors covered with the purple heather, quiet streams rippling lazily against rock and stone, sheltered bays where the waves steal slowly and gently up on the sand, — these are the places where our lost hours have taken up their abode.

Backward and forward they flit softly over the upland; in the depths of the woods they are lying asleep; they climb the sides of the great mountains, and rest under the crags; they look into the darksome pools, lurk in the bluebells, rest among the heather; they are dreaming by the sides of the streams, and looking with half-closed eyes out on the summer sea. If we want them, if we would recover the moments and the days, and the years stolen from our lives, it is in these places we must seek them. We must go far into the country, where time travels by slow stages, and the ordinary span of human existence lengthens its apparent duration, and seems about a hundred and fifty years.

The two hours George Geith had taken for his leisurely walk, would have passed in town almost without his noticing their flight; but in the country it seemed to him as though he had lived a little life on the road between St. Margaret's and Withefell.

He was near the end of his journey now. He was crossing the last field which separated him from the plantations of Molozane Park. At the end of the field was a stile, and beyond that a short path led through the wood to the highway beyond.

Before he left the field, George turned to look back on the way he had come. He stood on a slight rising ground, and was able to see over miles of country. Here a house,

there a farm-yard ; gently sloping hills crowned with clumps of trees.

To the east and south he gazed for a few minutes, like a man looking his last on something he might never see with the same feelings more, and then he pursued his way towards the northwest, whither he was bound.

As he neared the stile, he perceived on the other side of it a group, which he stopped to contemplate. Since he left Wattisbridge he had met no person except an old shepherd ; and the little picture which was now on view at the entrance of the wood had therefore all the charm of novelty for him.

Through the trees the evening sun shone brightly on the turf ; down a grassy glade his path lay straight, a path shaded by branches that wound their arms together to make the great cathedral arch from whence all other cathedral arches have been copied ; whilst for foreground, George's picture had a young girl, a black retriever, and a white poodle.

The girl occupied the lowest step of the stile, the retriever sat on his haunches beside her, gravely watching the performances of the poodle, which was standing on its hind legs, and balancing a piece of biscuit on its pink nose. So deeply interested did the trio appear in the last-mentioned feat, that George had time to notice the flow of the lady's dress, the cool-looking plain check ribbons with which her bonnet was trimmed, a slit in her parasol, the very color of the hair which peeped from beneath her bonnet curtain, before his own appearance was observed.

" You may have it now," said the girl, at last ; and thereupon the poodle threw the piece up in the air, caught it, came down to earth, ate his reward, and took up his position on his hind legs once more.

" All done," observed his mistress, and she swept the crumbs off her dress on the ground. " Why, what is the matter, Royal?" and, looking round to see what the dog was growling at, she beheld Mr. Geith standing on the other side of the stile, *looking at her*.

Brown eyes, a blushing face, a hand laid on the dog's head, a smile which would, but for the fact of his being an utter stranger, have been a laugh, a sweet, young fresh voice saying, —

“ I am afraid we have been in your way. Royal will not bite.”

That was all. He had seen, he had heard, he had raised his hat, he had passed, and left the group behind.

As he walked down the glebe, thinking how much better girls look in the country than in town, how much space in which to see a picture adds to its effect, how much more noticeable that very pretty creature he had just disturbed was surrounded by trees and fields, than many another far prettier young lady he had seen in London. The notion never entered George Geith's mind that that stile, that girl, that grave retriever, that ridiculous poodle, had been photographed for his benefit, and that through all the years to come, let them be long, let them be short, that little scene at the entrance of the wood would remain stamped on his mind indelibly. The thought never entered into his head then, that, after many days, he should look at that picture through a mist of tears; that with dim eyes he should see the glory of that summer scene flickering before him; that his heart would ache at the thought of that day as it had never ached before; that all hardness should die out of his nature when memory brought back that upturned face, and that before the great misery of his future he should lie down like a coward refusing to battle more.

Ah, me! hard though George Geith might be, unpitying as he was, I know that, could he have foreseen what the future held for him and for her, he would have turned on his path, and, leaving the woods and the fields and the sweet country air, have gone back to his city drudgery again like a Spartan.

He would have taken the sunshine out of his own life to save the clouds from darkening down on hers. He would

have left the dear face to smile on still, the guileless heart to throb calmly. He would have left his day without a morn to prevent night closing over hers. He would have known it was possible for him to love so well that he should become unselfish; and for her sake, for the sake of the girl he had seen only for a moment, he would have opened the volume of his life and written "Blank" across every page to come.

But as it was, so it was; and all unconscious of what the future was holding for him, George Geith walked along the path, through the glade, under the shadow of arching trees, straight as he could go to meet his destiny.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

WHEN George Geith reached the end of the path he looked back, as was perhaps only natural; but the girl and her companions were gone.

Once he got into the high road, however, he saw mistress and dogs behind him, the former walking beside a lady on horseback, the latter demurely pacing through the dust.

Not being perfectly sure as to whether a certain red brick mansion, which he saw before him in the distance, might be the Dower House or not, the accountant walked slowly on, so slowly that horse and rider, and flowing muslin dress and canine attendants, all passed him before he was half-way to its entrance gates.

As she walked by, the younger of the two ladies glanced towards him with a look of semi-recognition. Whilst the retriever was so obliging as to turn his head and look solemnly in the stranger's face. Somewhat mysteriously George bestowed his attention on neither; but fixed it on the equestrian, who was undeniably handsome, and graceful to boot. She rode a beautiful horse, a creature which seemed so proud of itself, and of her, that it scarcely knew what to do for very vanity.

It arched its neck, it seemed dancing as it walked, it touched the ground daintily with its hoofs, as though afraid of soiling them. Its tail was not still for one second, and it champed at the bits and looked down, as if it were contem-



plating its chest, and thinking how smooth and bright and glossy was its skin.

As for his rider, George had never seen so beautiful a woman: dark hair, dark eyes, small regular features, dainty hands that held the reins lightly, a figure that seemed to sway and bend with every movement of the horse, and lost with at least an expression so haughty that it seemed to ignore the humble pedestrian and refused to notice him even by a glance.

Well, he did not want her to notice him; he merely wanted liberty to look; and he did look long after she had passed, long after he could see her face, when it was only possible for him to observe the graceful swaying of her slight lithe figure.

Then he waited for the groom to come up with him, that he might ask him the way to the Dower House.

"Mr. Molozane," suggested the man; "that is the place just before you; the drive is about a hundred yards further; but as you're a-foot you can go in by the green gates and straight up to the hall-door;" and having vouchsafed this piece of information, the speaker, who had stopped to give it, put his horse to a trot after his mistress.

"A somewhat fast groom for a young lady," thought George, as he followed the man with his eye.

He had seen so much of servants in the earlier part of his life, that he knew at once the lady's attendant was not one he should have selected; and he walked on to the Dower House wondering who the lady might be, and why the man had looked so intelligent when he asked for the Dower House.

"I wonder if she is Mr. Molozane's daughter," he thought, even whilst he inspected the little gate, and made his way between hedges of evergreens to the house. "A pretty place," was his next reflection, as the walk bore suddenly to the right, bringing him at once from amongst the evergreens, and in front of the hall-door. "A place I should not mind

living in if I had seven or eight thousand a year ;” and after he had knocked, he stood looking over the undulating grounds, and thick plantations, and broad acres of Molozane Park, of which property the Dower House was merely a little dependency.

It had been the residence of the dowager ladies of Molozane for a hundred years or more. Widows had retired there when another queen came to reign at the park : sisters had lived there in state, till another widow claimed it, and they left it for homes of their own. That house had kept the ladies of the Molozane family up almost in their former station when husbands and fathers were dead ; but until misfortunes came thick and heavy on the race, it had never been tenanted by a man. Now a man lived in it, — sure sign that the name was about to become extinct, — a poor, proud man, without a son.

Into this man’s presence George Geith was ushered by the servant who answered his summons, and who showed him first into the drawing-room, and afterwards requested him to walk into the library.

There, on a sofa, lay Mr. Molozane, pale with long confinement to the house, weak with recent illness.

He rose as the accountant entered ; and with only the slightest trace of his former hauteur, thanked him for his promptitude, but reminded him he had asked to be apprised of his coming.

“ I wrote yesterday,” George answered.

“ I shall have the letter to-morrow morning, then,” said Mr. Molozane. “ We have but one post a day, and all our letters go first to Hertford and then back to Wattisbridge. It was very kind of you to come so soon. I am sorry, however, that there was no one to meet you at the station.”

“ Thank you,” answered George, quietly ; “ but I liked the walk from St. Margaret’s better than I could possibly have liked the drive. This is a new country to me. I have never been in Hertfordshire before.”

"It is pretty," said Mr. Molozane; "at least, I think it so. I know most of the English shires, and yet I fancy no home in any of them could be so pleasant as one amongst the green fields of Hertfordshire;" and as he spoke the poor gentleman involuntarily turned towards the window, which commanded a view of the fair estate that was passing from him and from his so swiftly.

George's eye followed the same direction, and when Mr. Molozane looked round, their glances met.

There was no need for the accountant to be told the end. He read the ruin had come; and that the man, the poor, proud, speculative, over-sanguine man, was staring it in the face.

"I went down into Cornwall, Mr. Geith," his host began, after a pause, "and the mine was just a clay-pit. When I looked at it, I could think of nothing but a gigantic grave, dug for the burial of the hearts and hopes and fortunes of men like myself. I might as rationally go to Wattisbridge church-yard and ask the dead to rise, as expect anything ever to come out of the Sythlow Mines, save beggary for me and mine.

"And so," he went on, after a pause, "I have ventured to ask you to look into the actual state of my affairs, and tell me exactly how I stand, and what I ought to do."

"Do you wish me to transact this business here, or in town?" asked the accountant.

"Here," answered Mr. Molozane; "the fact is, I have never been methodical — never kept accounts — or been exact in any way, and I should require always to be at hand to explain the meaning of various entries, and to tell you what money has been paid and is still owing.

"But we will talk of these things after dinner, Mr. Geith," added Mr. Molozane, rising at the first sound of the dressing-bell, thankful, apparently, for the chance of postponing disagreeable conversation even for a season. "I will send over to St. Margaret's for your luggage," his host went on, as they ascended the staircase side by side.

"Of course you had no intention of returning to London to-night?"

"If possible, I should like to do so," George replied.

"But it is not possible," said Mr. Molozane; "and I shall send to St. Margaret's immediately."

"Fearing I might not be able to catch the up-train, I told the porter to send on my bag to Wattisbridge. If I cannot get back to St. Margaret's in time, I shall remain at the 'Greyhound' for the night."

"Excuse me, Mr. Geith," said his host, "but that you shall not; I did n't bring a man thirty miles out of his way, and then suffer him to seek his welcome at an inn. I may not very long have a house to call my own; but that is one reason the more why I should press such poor hospitality as it can offer on those who come to see me. You will stay?"

"You are very good, I will," George answered; and he walked over to the window of the room in which Mr. Molozane left him, with a softened kindly feeling that was a stranger to his heart.

Standing there, he looked out over wood and field, over park and plantation, and wondered how he should feel were he in the shoes of the man who had just left him, and saw all this — name, fortune, position — passing away.

How should he feel, if he stood on the lands of his father, a mere tenant-at-will, proffering hospitality, which it could not be long in his power to extend to friend or stranger.

"It would be worse than hanging," thought the accountant; and having arrived at this conclusion, he began to make such improvements in his outward appearance as were possible under the circumstances.

When he had finished, he went down-stairs again, encountering in the hall, first, the white poodle, and then his acquaintance of the stile.

"Are you looking for papa?" asked this young lady, who never under any circumstances seemed to lose the use of her tongue; "he will be ready in a few minutes. Perhaps you will come into the drawing-room with me."

Geith was quite willing to go anywhere with her, and his guide into a large apartment, where, seated before an embroidery frame, he beheld the lady who had excited his admiration so short a time before.

"Sister," said his companion; "Mr. Geith," supplied the beauty made a slight inclination to the roses on her dress. She never looked at the stranger; she never said him a word.

"Louise Molozane," was the next introduction; and truly the oddest little creature Mr. Geith had seen in a long day came forward, and shook hands with him, with the most imperturbable gravity,

and was very glad to see him."

Small in height, a woman in address, a something which we sorely puzzled any one who did not see her face, and with the air of a girl of about fourteen, who wore a cap with a plain border, in which rows of narrow ribbon were interspersed intervals.

She was original, with a wistful, old-fashioned expression of countenance, who, with perfect self-possession, and a grave and unembarrassed courtesy of a matron of rank, had George under her charge, and began to do the duty with all solemnity.

"I feared he must have found it very warm walking to the station; she hoped he was not tired; she was glad to have enjoyed the walk. Beryl had been over at Wattis-he said she had seen him in the wood. And had you heard of Royal and Guess? Guess could stand on his feet for any length of time; would march round the world if any one played for him; would drop down dead if he were to be fainted. He would stand on his hind feet and then drop backward and lie with his eyes shut till he was winkled him. Most people," proceeded the oracle, "are much better than Royal, but for her part, she prefers Beryl. Royal could protect and carry. He could

take letters to the post-office. If Beryl told him to take care of anything, nobody dare touch it till Beryl herself came back. Beyond all," and this seemed the crowning perfection in the girl's eyes, "there were some people Royal hated, and that he would not come to for bread or meat or even bones.

"And he likes bones better than beef," finished this Solomon; and she sat silent for a minute as if searching for some cause for so singular a taste.

Meantime the beauty sat behind her embroidering frame, silent and undemonstrative.

There was something so irritating in her industry that Beryl, looking towards her, reddened, bit her lips, and then rushed into conversation with their guest.

Did he like country or town the best. Was not Wattisbridge Church very picturesque and pretty? Was it not pleasant walking across the fields to Withefell. She, Miss Beryl Molozane, did not know how any one could live in London. It would break her heart, she was sure, to be poked up in a town.

"It is bad enough staying at grandmamma's," finished the young lady; "and she does not live in town, but in a great stiff house at Kensington. I always feel when I come home again, as though I had been just let out of prison."

At this point Miss Molozane lifted her eyes from her embroidery, and looked towards her sister. She did not speak a word, but Beryl understood the look and answered it.

"If one does not like a place, Matilda, there is no use in saying one does."

"No one asked you, Beryl, to express an opinion about the matter," said the beauty; and that was the first sentence George Geith heard her speak.

"But Beryl always expresses opinions, and Beryl shall do so if she likes," said the aristocrat of fourteen; at which speech even Miss Molozane laughed, for it was not in ~~fact~~ and blood to help laughing at the way the girl spoke.

"What is amusing you all?" asked Mr. Molozane, entering the room at the moment.

"We are laughing at Louey, papa," answered his second daughter, vacating the easy-chair she occupied, for his benefit; "she says I am to express what opinions I choose, even though I speak nasty about Kensington. We three will join together and fight for the country, and Mr. Geith and Matilda may defend town if they can."

"I trust you will not imagine I prefer London," exclaimed George, a little eagerly. "Were I able to choose my home, I should not remain in it an hour; but if a man be not able to make a selection, it is surely wise for him to think the best he can of the place in which he is compelled to reside."

"Yours is good philosophy, Mr. Geith," said his host; "but I am afraid neither Beryl nor I could carry it into practice."

"And yet," added the Molozane Solomon, "as Mr. Geith puts it, I am sure he is right. I never thought before about people not being able to choose for themselves."

"Nine out of ten are chosen for," answered George, as gravely as though he had been speaking to a dowager of seventy. "I do not know many who are free to come, to go, to travel, or stay at home, just as they please. *Must* seems to be the law of this world, and I do not know but after all it is a very wholesome law by which to be governed."

"It may be very wholesome, but it is very stern," said Mr. Molozane, who perhaps was not sorry that the announcement of dinner ended the conversation.

He took charge of his eldest daughter, and Beryl was consequently left to Mr. Geith, who could not help noticing two things on his way to the dining-room: one, the queenly air with which Miss Molozane swept across the hall; and the other, that the youngest sister took hold of Beryl's hand, clasping it in both of hers. That was evidently the manner in which they were accustomed to go about together.

Wisdom leaning on Frivolity — Gravity nestling Fun.

Quite as a matter of course, Beryl took the head table; apparently she was housekeeper, mistress, for Miss Molozane did nothing.

She did not contribute so much to the general of the party as even an ordinary guest might have done; she sat perfectly silent, eating little, touching no wine, no remark, — answering, certainly, when spoken to by father or sisters, but volunteering no observation of her own.

And yet, for the life of him, George could not get on with her. He would rather have had one word from her than a whole day's talk with Beryl. She irritated, and tantalized him. He knew she thought beneath her notice, and that she disapproved of his sitting at table with them. He was perfectly well aware that Miss Molozane did not forget he was a city man, and that she did not consider city men fit associates for so superior a woman as herself; but still she was the one of the family from whom he most desired a smile. He had always been a beauty; he had generally been regarded kindly by his friends, and yet here was a woman who did not care for his position, who would rather have resented the idea of any man in his position daring to admire her.

The pretty face had no chance beside the handsome. Beryl was ready enough to talk to him, to attend to his wants, to keep the conversational ball rolling; but she did not care for George, and was ungrateful enough not to be thankful for her efforts to amuse him.

Without her that dinner would have been a very dull meal to every one at the table, for Mr. Molozane was preoccupied, and the youngest-born did not contribute much to the general amusement.

At first George could not comprehend why her father and Beryl were so anxious concerning the state of her



why tidbits were pressed on her, and wine in quantity poured out for her benefit. He could not understand why a really very tolerable dinner did not seem to satisfy the requirements of the relations; but at last Beryl explained that Loney had been ill of fever in the spring, and that she had never got so strong since as they could desire.

"Weakness seems harder to conquer than absolute disease," added Mr. Molozane; and he looked at his child as he spoke, with an expression George could not read at the time, though he understood its meaning afterwards.

The cloth was scarcely drawn before the ladies retired; and then George expected that Mr. Molozane would speak to him about his affairs.

No such thing, however; his affairs seemed to be the last topic on which Mr. Molozane desired to touch.

He was not going to spoil the flavor of his wine with business. He was willing to talk on any subject save that which lay nearest his heart, — politics, horses, fishing, shooting, farming, books, about all these things Mr. Molozane conversed freely. Anything except that for which Mr. Geith had come down from London his host was willing to speak of. There had been a time when mines and railways had always been on the tip of his tongue, but that time was past and gone. Mines and railways and speculations of all sorts had settled his fortunes; and, like most men who have built, and spent, and been happy upon the possible, Mr. Molozane could not endure even to mention the certain.

"No, we need not trouble about business just now," he declared; "we will go and have some coffee."

And to the drawing-room they adjourned accordingly, here Beryl poured them out coffee, and Miss Molozane, her father's request, went reluctantly to the piano and sang the songs he best loved to hear.

Her music, like her face, was perfection; and George, listening to her in the twilight, went back days and months and years, to the time when he was young; when mammas

pronounced him "eligible," and girls warbled they were near, and fans grew animated at his approach, old days when he was so much at Snareham was a clergyman, when he never thought to be an in Fen Court, satisfied with his lot.

## CHAPTER XV.

## BERYL.

NOTWITHSTANDING Mr. Molozane's courtesy and his daughter's sweet music, Mr. Geith was quite determined to get to business before he slept, and he accordingly begged, nay, insisted, that his host should devote a few minutes to explaining the state of his affairs ere they separated for the night.

"We may not have time, and you might not have inclination to talk about money-matters to-morrow," urged the accountant, whilst he and Mr. Molozane walked up and down the terrace together, smoking in the gathering twilight. "Tell me, therefore, as far as you can, how you are situated, and give me what papers you have to look over to-night. I shall then be able to form some idea of the work you wish me to do before I leave in the morning."

"I do not know how I am situated," answered his companion. "I only know I am overwhelmed with debt in the present, and that I am afraid to look into the future. And yet I have not lived extravagantly, Mr. Geith; you must see that yourself. Look at my house, my table, my children: there is no extravagance there. I have only one man about the place, and he is hostler, coachman, messenger, gardener, everything. No person can for years have been more economical than I, and yet — and yet" —

"It is possible," added George, gently, "for a man to be economical in some things, and still to spend a fortune in others. The Sythlow Mines may have been an evil, but other evils must have preceded their failure."

"How do you know that?" asked Mr. Molozane.

"I know it, because the money you paid for shares cannot of itself have very seriously embarrassed you, and no call has as yet been made upon you."

"And what do you infer from that?"

"I infer that you must have been unfortunate before you ever heard of the Sythlow Mines; that you must have speculated, and lost heavily in other ventures."

"You are right," said Mr. Molozane. "I have been all my life trying to retrieve my position, and the consequence is, I have gone from bad to worse. It is no wonder we are considered detest the very name of business, for we always come off worst when we attempt to play at it."

"Because you do play at it," retorted George; "business is like learning, the man who works acquires, the man who plays gains nothing. Business is an edge-tool which ought not to be touched save by hands that have served an apprenticeship to its use."

"There are some that no experience would teach to handle it with impunity," persisted Mr. Molozane.

"Then they ought to learn not to handle it at all," said the accountant.

"They do learn that, but too late, unfortunately," sighed his companion; and the pair walked the whole length of the terrace without another word.

At last George began: "I think it very possible that the mines do not turn out very badly indeed, your affair might not prove to be in so hopeless a state as you seem to imagine. I had, not long ago, a client who thought his estates so much involved, that without help from his relations he could do nothing to extricate himself. When I came to examine into the matter, I found he would be able to clear his property in a few years. I always find that business people take too sanguine a view of their position; and country gentlemen look on the gloomiest side of the picture. Many a merchant tells me he knows his estate will pay a

is in the pound, and believes it would, although at the time he may be absolutely insolvent; and I have known gentlemen believe they were on the verge of beggary, their affairs had merely become a little entangled. I therefore, think that you need anticipate the worst, you have kept your accounts up square and close."

"I wish I could agree with you," answered Mr. Molozane; "but I could think there was even the faintest hope of success for me and mine. But you shall judge for yourself. I will look out my papers to-night, and you can glance over them in the morning, before you go."

"With your permission, I will do so before I sleep, and according to my opinion in the morning. I must be back in London before mid-day to-morrow, and I should like to know of what I shall have to do before my return. I will not work late; and if you give me the papers, I will look over them, if you allow me, in my room."

"You choose," said Mr. Molozane, wearily; and they went into the drawing-room, when candles were lighted, and the young ladies occupied, each according to her taste. Mr. Molozane was reading, Beryl was engaged in needle-work, and Louise sat at a side-table, writing. Her cap was in the candle, and her hands were black with ink. She was in the agonies of verse-making, George perceived and remained perfectly unconscious of their entrance, but when his father went up and said something to her in a low

voice, she blotted off her manuscript, closed her desk, and sat beside Beryl, who made believe to scold her for soiling her fingers, and for writing with a pen instead of a quill. The girl did not answer, she only drew closer to her, and looked at the various objects in the room, as if she did not clearly see them.

"I will not have Louise exhausting herself," exclaimed Mr. Molozane, irritably. "How many times am I to tell you, that she shall not write?"

"She frets so, papa," answered Beryl, softly; and George saw the tears coming into her own eyes as she spoke.

"It was not Beryl's fault," said Miss Molozane, from immeasurable distance; "I told Louise to write if she l for when she is not scribbling she teases me to death. will recite out loud, and is a perfect torment."

"She may as well be writing as thinking, papa," a Beryl; and she took the inky fingers in hers, and st them caressingly.

Looking at the pair, George Geith could not but feel there must be something very lovable in the nature o second sister, and for a minute or two he almost ad her more than the stately beauty who could not tolerat gushings of Louise's muse.

But was Louise's muse merely gushing. If so, what the meaning of the strange, absent expression her face at the moment; what was it that the poor, weary c looking with great eyes out into the darkening night held? Did she see visions, and dream dreams? Wa only land of liberty man ever enters here below — the l less realm of imagination — free to the young creatur fore him?

Could she see what he might never behold — the flo and the fields, and the hills and the valleys of that se world? Could she see men and women walking throu not like phantoms, but like real beings of flesh and bl Could she hear words spoken inaudible to other ears? she really know the full particulars of troubles, joy, h fears, in which no mortal beside herself might ever sharer; or was it all nonsense? Was the rhyme a k the verse meaningless, her genius but common talent? the soul looking out of her eyes did not belong to her had wandered forth from the body of some great poet entered by mistake into the poor child's fragile frame.

But if it were genius that abode in her, where had sh it? whence had it come? what would she do with it? V

the fire blaze fitfully for a season and then die out? In future days would she burn her manuscripts and settle down into a commonplace woman, happy and contented like her neighbors? Would she dream away her life writing sonnets, making verses, scribbling poetry? Would she neither work nor rest, be useful neither as author nor housewife? or would she pass through the fire to success? Would she reach the hill-top of fame to sit there triumphant, but lonely? Would she yet wear laurels wet with tears, yet be clad in purple, which should conceal wounds and scars? Would the little creature's life be more interesting, more exciting than that of thousands of more attractive girls; or would she outgrow it all, become commonplace, and, sweeping aside the ashes of her dead genius, light home-fires on the once cheerless hearth, — fires which should gladden her own, as well as other hearts, and enable her to perform her woman's mission better than she could ever hope to do with pen and ink?

As he worked through the short hours of that summer's night, George Geith often caught himself speculating about the future of the three girls, marvelling concerning them! Now it was Miss Molozane, now Beryl, now Louise; and then George found himself back to the active duties surrounding him, and read on, on, on, till he arose, amazed at the folly revealed to him.

Mortgages enough to have swamped any man; interest unpaid and accumulating; money put into the maddest ventures conceivable; what the Molozane property might be worth the accountant had no means of judging, but unless its value were considerable, he felt certain there would be a very faint response to even the first call of the Sythlow Mining Company.

Having arrived at this conclusion, George put his papers aside and went to bed.

When he awoke next morning he had the greatest difficulty to remember where he was. He looked round the right airy room, he raised himself on his elbow to listen to

the cawing of the rooks, and the cooing of Beryl's pigeons. When he opened his window, such a sweet fresh smell of the country rushed into the apartment that he had to pause in his dressing thoroughly to enjoy the perfume-laden breeze.

Early as it was, he could hear Beryl out in the garden talking and laughing; and he hastened away down-stairs, so as not to lose a moment of that glorious summer morning, on which the sun seemed to shine differently to what it had done any day for years past.

In the lower rooms he saw no one but a housemaid; and so he passed through the hall-door, which stood invitingly open, and remained for a minute or two looking over the lawn, and the fields, to the woods belonging to Molezane Park.

Very charming was the Dower House, with its wealth of climbing roses, and sweet-scented honeysuckles, with its old-fashioned casements, its thick hedges, and its thorough seclusion. But for the gables and the chimneys, which appeared amongst the trees in the distance, any one might have supposed the Park to have been an appendage of the Dower House, instead of the Dower House being an appendage of the Park.

"And how long will even this be his?" thought George Geith, as he leaned against one of the pillars of the porch. How long indeed?

Just then Beryl came in sight, with hands full of flowers, and face bright with health. She advanced to greet their guest, and congratulate him on his industry.

"So you really do get up early, after all; papa said you were not to be disturbed on any account, for that no Londoners liked to rise before mid-day."

"I am generally up sooner than this," George answered; "but even if it were not so, I do not know who could sleep on and let a summer's morning slip out of his life unenjoyed."

"I know several who would rather sleep than do any



thing," observed the young lady. "When grandmamma is here, her curtains are never undrawn till twelve o'clock; and as for my cousin, I sometimes think he will never get up at all. I cannot understand it," finished Beryl. "I cannot understand people not liking to be out and about such a morning as this."

"Nor I," echoed George; "but then, to be sure, such a morning as this, in such a place as this, is new to me."

"Do you always live in town, then?" she asked.

"Always," was the reply.

"But you surely travel some part of the year; or, at any rate, go to the sea-side, or Ireland, or Wales, or Scotland, or somewhere."

"I never go to any place except on business."

"And don't you get horribly tired of business?"

"No; and it would be of no use if I did, for I should have to go on working just the same."

"I should not like to have to work," said Beryl, naively.

"It seems to me so much pleasanter to be able to do precisely what one likes. Mr. Geith," she suddenly added, "how do you think papa's affairs will turn out? Have you any idea how he is really situated?"

The question was unexpected, but George was not thrown off his guard.

"I am not in a position to form any opinion on the subject," he said. "It would take a long time to ascertain exactly how Mr. Molozane stands."

"And if you had taken that long time, and had ascertained, you would not tell me," added Beryl, with a smile.

"Is that what you mean, Mr. Geith? If so, you may be frank with me, for papa and I have no secrets."

"I am perfectly frank with you," was the reply. "I am saying now what I shall say to Mr. Molozane when I see him,—that it is impossible for any one to tell how he is situated till there is some regular statement got out of his affairs."

“And how long would it take to get out that statement?”

“A considerable time, I am afraid, for the accounts have not been regularly kept.” /

“Notwithstanding the headaches we have given ourselves over them,” sighed Beryl. “Papa and I have spent hours over those papers, till I am sure our brains have been addled. But I hope we shall be able to keep the Park. I do hope and trust papa will not have to sell that.”

“You mean Molozone Park?”

“Yes; he talked of selling that and keeping this place; but even if we had to live on bread and water, I should like to try and keep the Park. It is something to feel it is one's own, although it is let. Perhaps I ought not to say so, but I do believe it is the prettiest place in Hertfordshire, and it would be a terrible thing to let it go out of the family. I can show you the house from the end of the Elm Avenue, if you would care to see it. Papa will not be down for half an hour yet. He has not been able to rise early since his illness. Would you like to see the Park?”

What could George say but “yes”; and indeed he was only too willing to go; for the girl's perfect straightforwardness and utter want of conventionality was to the accountant something almost like a new revelation.

She seemed to have nothing to keep back, nothing to hide. She claimed his sympathy and interest as a matter of right; and she seemed to think that he would go heart and soul into the question of keeping the Park as she did.

“I will leave the flowers in the house,” she said, “and be back in a moment;” and back in a moment she was ready to trip off by his side to the Elm Avenue.

As they walked, George looked at his companion more attentively than he had cared to do before, and came to the conclusion, that really Beryl, when away from her sister, was a very pretty girl.

And Beryl was pretty. It is a pleasure to me to lay down my pen, and think of that face which I have seen so

often. As I write, it rises out of the past, and comes up for me to paint it. I can see the girl in the beauty of her youth and innocence, standing with the sunshine streaming on her hair, which was of that rarest brown we, for want of a better name, call chestnut. How shall I, without colors to my hand, describe that hair? — nut-brown with a shade of red thrown over it, dark hair that yet looked golden in the sun, hair that made her skin seem white as snow, that was plaited after the fashion of those days and coiled round and round her head behind, — hair without a wave — smooth, glossy, bright, luxuriant, — hair, for one lock of which one man in the world, at any rate, would have come down had he dared from Molozane Park and begged like a beggar at the gates of the Dower House.

Then, her eyes, — those dear, sweet, kindly brown eyes, that seemed to be always laughing; and loving eyes that beamed as though they would never be troubled; eyes that made one forget every other feature in her face, and insist that on their merits alone she should be judged.

What did it matter if her mouth were a little too large, and her nose scarcely large enough? What did it signify if her face were a shade too broad, so long as she possessed those eyes, that exquisite complexion, and luxuriant hair? Without being in the least degree handsome, Beryl Molozane was pretty enough to have satisfied the requirements of most people.

Sweet seventeen; lively, happy, ingenuous; what better companion could a man desire for a summer morning's walk, with the dew still lying heavy on the grass?

George Geith was contented with her, at any rate. She was a girl, he felt, who grew on him as he saw more of her. The pleasant chatter with which she ran on, as they passed through the garden and out into the shrubbery beyond, amused him like the prattle of a child.

Their path led them close to the farm-yard, where George saw Royal and the poodle gravely superintending the clean

ing of a small black pony. Royal was stretched at full length, with his nose between his fore paws, whilst Guess sat on the top of a barrel, looking sideways at the proceeding.

"Royal, Royal!" called out his mistress; and in a moment both dogs came towards them at full flight. The poodle won by about a length, but was overturned at Beryl's feet by the retriever.

"Be quiet, sir! down, Royal!" and, indeed, she might well say down, for the great black dog had both paws on her shoulder, and his nose in her face. Next minute, however, he had left his mistress, and was growling at her companion, whilst the poodle commenced barking and yelping in chorus.

"Now, Mr. Geith, we shall see whether Royal will take kindly to you or not. It is quite true what Louey says, that there are some people he will never like. Royal, be quiet, this moment, and listen to me. Sit down, sir; sit down and attend;" and she raised her forefinger as a signal, while the dog obeyed, sitting down on his haunches, and wagging his bushy tail from side to side, whilst he kept one eye on Beryl and the other turned suspiciously on the stranger. "This gentleman, Royal, is a friend of mine, and you are to shake hands with him. Now, shake," she said, as George held out his hand towards the animal,—"shake like any good old dog."

For a minute Royal remained perfectly still. His tail lay motionless on the ground, and he looked George gravely in the face, with his soft wise eyes. Then, as if satisfied, he solemnly lifted his paw, and allowed George to take it.

"That is right!" exclaimed Beryl, triumphantly; "but listen, Mr. Geith: he is going to give the other, too." And she was correct. As if to make assurance doubly sure, Royal, with a gravity which would have befitted a religious ceremonial, held out his left paw for Mr. Geith's acceptance.

Beholding this, the poodle straightway got up on his hind legs, and walked towards the stranger.

"That is his way of evincing friendship," Beryl explained; and the quartet proceeded on their way.

Up the long elm avenue Beryl and her companion walked side by side, talking about all manner of things as they walked ; but still coming back to the question which evidently lay near the girl's heart.

Should they or should they not be able to keep the park. The idea that they might not be able to retain even the Dower House had never evidently crossed her mind.

"It would be so sad," Mr. Geith, "to have to part with all this. The park begins from the bottom of this elm avenue ; and that is the house belonging to the property. I am sure, if the place were yours, you would be loth to see it passing away into the hands of strangers."

Silently George looked out over the park, which lay stretched before them. They had been ascending gradually since they left the Dower House ; and now, as they stood beside a rustic gate, which afforded egress from the so-called avenue, he could see all the mortgaged acres, all the woods and plantations ; the noble mansion, and the silvery lake, which might be owned by Ambrose Molozane, in the dreamy future, never more.

Looking at the scene, as it lay bathed in the glory of morning, George Geith felt that were such an heritage passing away from him he should go mad to behold it. Would the man whose daughter stood beside him prove more philosophical ? Would he, could he, go out and fight as he, George Geith, had done ? The property must go ; but when it was gone, what then ? Perhaps the girls had money on which their father might live ; perhaps they would marry, and he find a home with one of them.

How would it turn out ? Would the man live ? would he fight ? would he lie down in despair ? or would he plod wearily on his way to the grave, whilst all this great possession, all this wood and field and water, lay calmly smiling in the sunshine, owned by strangers, who should tramp his name from out the soil ?

"You could not sell it, could you, Mr. Geith ?" she asked ;

and the question brought him back to every-day considerations.

"I should not like to do so," he answered; "but under some circumstances I might think it expedient to sell for all that."

And he would have turned to look at the place again, but that Beryl suggested they had better retrace their steps.

"Papa may be down by this time," she said, "and Louey is sure to be, and we never like Louey to wait for her breakfast. She is so delicate, we are always afraid of trying her strength in the least."

"I did not think she looked delicate last night," said George, who wanted Beryl to talk about her sister if she would.

"You can't always judge by looks," answered his companion; "Louey is not at all strong. And then that writing!" she added; "I sometimes wish I could burn all the books and pen and ink and paper in the world; but then I suppose she would write with a stick on the ground. We have lost one sister already," she went on in a lower tone; "one sister exactly like Louey, only, perhaps, not quite so old-fashioned (I call Louey old-fashioned for want of a better word), and that makes me over-anxious about her. People say, grand-mamma wants papa to send her to school, but we could not part with her; and even if we could, a school would kill her in a month."

"And what does she write?" asked George. "I am perhaps impertinent in putting such a question; but I really can't conceive what a child, for she is little more than a child, can find to write about."

"I am sure I cannot exactly tell you," answered Beryl; "we don't pay much attention to what she writes, for fear of encouraging her. She has written some tragedies; and if she reads anything in history that strikes her fancy, she at once makes a scene out of the dryest bit of fact, and dresses it up into a long poem. She lies awake at night

muttering verses; and when she was so ill last winter she would stand up in bed making poetry about all sorts of things — principally about the angels. Half her time I think Louey is not in this world at all, but in some other of her own. As I tell you, however, we don't notice her much; and, besides, I cannot endure poetry. It is always melancholy, and I hate melancholy things. There is enough of trouble in the world without making more for ourselves out of books."

In the face of what he knew about the state of Mr. Molozane's affairs, it would have been vain for Mr. Geith to contradict his companion's opinion, even had he disagreed with it; but he thought, at the same time, that the Molozane's must be a curious family, not to know whether that, while Louise was pouring out her life in writing, even good, bad, or indifferent, whether such a passion had been given for nothing, or whether the child held concealed, under all her eccentricity, that precious pearl, genius, which is possessed by so few, and counterfeited by so many.

And yet, scanning Louise's face attentively by the unflinching light of day, George Geith could not imagine the girl to be anything beyond the common. It is very possible her friends were right, and that she was merely old-fashioned. Certainly her sententious remarks were amazingly amusing, and the manner in which she was kind enough to express her approval of Mr. Geith's opinions comical in the extreme; but still, when all was said, her remarks were not clever; her ideas were perfectly commonplace and everyday. Hearing her talk was like hearing a child repeat, second-hand, the trite moralities, the cut-and-dried expressions of ordinary adults.

As for Miss Molozane, George was not favored with even a distant view of the lady, for she did not come down to breakfast, nor put in any appearance before he left the Dower House.

But he knew he was to see them all again, for he ar-

ranged with Mr. Molozane to come down, if possible, a day week, when his host promised he should get to work earnest.

"It is going to be such a warm afternoon," remarked Beryl, as she stood beside an open window. "Are you sorry, Mr. Geith, to have to go back to close, stifling, eating London?"

"Indeed I am," answered George, gallantly. "I did think my office unendurable yesterday, but I know I to-day;" and with this little speech he bade good-bye young lady and her sister, and started on his homeward journey.

He had said truly that he would find his office uncomfortable. The change from country to town, with the thermometer in the shade standing at somewhere about ninety, under no circumstances be considered pleasant; and a letter which he found lying on his desk did not by any means make him cooler.

There was not a word written inside it, but he pulled from the corner first a highly glazed envelope, ornamented with silver, which, in its turn, enclosed two cards pronounced to all whom it might concern the marriage of Mark and Lady Geith.



## CHAPTER XVI.

## FAMILY AFFAIRS.

WHEN George Geith took his cousin's wedding-cards out of their dainty envelope, he knew that the two possible possessions had been wrested from him; that in the future he might never marry Cissy Hayles; that no matter who lived or who died, he should never own Snareham Castle.

Certainly, it was by no means sure, either that Sir Mark would leave a son or survive his cousin, and there therefore remained a chance of the latter some day falling into the title; but, if he did, it would be a barren title, for never a Geith again, George clearly foresaw, would inherit at the same time wealth and rank together.

"A dowerless bride, a spendthrift bridegroom," muttered the accountant, bitterly; and he looked out at the trees in Fen Court, standing so still in summer noontide, and saw not them but the woods surrounding Snareham Castle, which were never now to be owned by him, whether baronet or accountant.

For some time previously he had concluded that his cousin meant to cut off the entail, but now he knew it. He felt sure, if Mark had been dealing fairly by him, he would have invited his kinsman to the wedding, and come and talked matters over with him first. But no; Mark had cheated him; and as he arrived at this conclusion, George Geith felt that he hated his cousin, as strong natures do hate weak ones before they despise them.

He had hastened back to town to work, but he could not

work. He was, for the time being, upset to find that by the aid of that wise act which does not do away with the law of entail, but which renders an entail something worse than useless when it is effected, he was cut off from his house.

For a younger son is only a younger son so long as he retains a chance, however remote, of succeeding to the family estate. Once that chance goes, as it had gone for George Geith, and he may as well be anybody else, Jones, Brown, or Robinson, as the second-born of a duke.

And with Snareham gone, what was George Geith even to himself, even in his own eyes, but this: a hard-working accountant, who had succeeded beyond his own expectation, perhaps, but who was, nevertheless, not even a city magnate; who was, even in commercial circles, only a tenth or twelfth-rate man; who had his way to make, and who, with all his exertions, had not yet got his bread buttered on one side?

Always before this he had been to *himself*; been something higher; and, for a man's comfort, it signifies a great deal more what he is to himself than what he appears to be to others.

I do not say that all this passed through George Geith's mind as I have written it; on the contrary, every feeling, save anger against Mark, was vague and confused.

The great injustice which his cousin had inflicted on him seemed for the moment to have swallowed up all thought of how that injustice affected his own present prospects.

"It was such a mean thing," thought the accountant; "and it was such a mean way to do it. If he must have cut off the entail, why did he not come to me like a man, and say he had not the courage and patience to wait and clear his estate, and that he intended to free himself of debt more expeditiously than by saving? I would not have hindered him anyhow; but, as it is, first of all telling me he would not cut off the entail, and then doing it. I do hate a fellow who has not pluck enough to face the consequence of his own actions."

It was a natural thought; but even as it passed through his mind, George remembered that he had kept something in his own life very close, that he had never looked forward to consequences, and that when they came he had fled rather than face them. True, that something affected only himself, but, had it been otherwise, would he have been braver?

Thinking of that past so full of misery, that past which had brought him to the naked present, the accountant could not but acknowledge that in his hour of trial he had been found wanting, and that, if he had wrought out the plan of his own life better, his cousin's life might have been different too.

Had he been able to remain in the Church, Sir Mark would never have met Cissy Hayles, never have married her; perhaps never, with a male relative at his hand to warn him of danger, have suffered his affairs to become so hopelessly entangled. As it was, without friend or rudder, he had drifted out to sea, and from the barren rocks whereon he had elected to take his future stand, George Geith watched the vessel which contained Snareham and independence sailing straight away to ruin.

"He will be a beggar before he is ten years older," concluded the accountant, "before ten years, if he lives so long;" and as he sketched out this pleasant ending for his cousin, George Geith thought of the sentence which Sir Mark had spoken in jest, but one part of which seemed destined to come true at any rate: "When I am retrenching on the Continent, you will be a great man."

Supposing the rise as well as the fall proved a true prophecy; supposing that as Mark came down George ascended.

There was something very pleasant to the accountant in the idea of that possibility — something which smothered his temper and awakened his charity.

"It will be worse for him than for me, if he has done it,"

argued George, "for I am working, and can work, and he cannot. Besides he is doing himself out of a certainty, and depriving me only of a possibility. Before I condemn him absolutely, also, I must be sure I am not accusing him falsely. Perhaps my aunt has come to; but if so, why was I not asked to the wedding? That might be the Hayles' doings; yes, that would be the Hayles" —

And thinking of the Hayles, the accountant laughed aloud, whereupon Mr. Foss opened the door between the two offices, and inquired if he had called.

"No — yes," answered his principal. "I am going out, and if anybody wants me I shall not be back for two or three hours."

"If Timmins calls about his schedule?"

"He shall have it this evening."

"Hunt will be here to know when his books can be balanced; what shall I tell him?"

"You may tell him to go hang himself," retorted Mr. Geith, as he took down his hat and brushed it. "He has let his books run back three years, and then expects them to be finished in a day. He shall have his turn, that is all I can promise him."

"And that little account of Mallard's?"

"I'll send it round."

"And — Mr. Geith," called the clerk, running down the stairs and out into the court, "Lavers wants to see you particularly."

"I will call." And before Mr. Foss could recollect any other person who wanted anything of his employer, George was half-way up Fenchurch Street on his way to the west. He wanted to see the only man in London who knew all the ins and outs of his affairs, who had stood as a breakwater between him and his enemy in days gone by, and who had communicated to him the news of his freedom. This person, Mr. Tettin, would ascertain for him whether or not Sir Mark had really cut off the entail, and then, if ever the accountant

met his cousin again, he would know precisely on what ground they were standing.

Mr. Tettin's practice lay much amongst the clergy. He had likewise the honor of being professional adviser, solicitor, man of business, what you will, to several noblemen and baronets, — in addition to which he had many untitled but wealthy clients who owned houses in town, and estates in the country, who had large balances at their bankers, and money in the funds.

With business, with trade, Mr. Tettin might, in a general way, be said to have nothing to do. He left the affairs of merchants and citizens alone. He had nothing to do with companies; but in all charitable societies, all clerical schemes of benevolence, Mr. Tettin had a finger, and the consequence was, that, by reason of his long contact with Christianity, and all manner of good works, the solicitor had acquired such pleasant manners, such a grave, bland, courteous, self-possessed style of address, that it was quite delightful to hear him talk, and to know that he regarded law as a religious matter which tended to the general well-being and social and moral improvement of every man, woman, and child in the community.

Somehow the philanthropic literature on the boxes ranged along his shelves, made one feel as if *he* were the prime mover in all good works.

Then his bookcases, they were as full of divinity as of law. They had "thoughts," and "evidences," and "proofs" in abundance. Doubters might there find their answer. Infidels were there confuted. Very few of Mr. Tettin's clients but had contributed his mite to the literature of Great Britain; and a copy of every book they had written found a home in Mr. Tettin's office.

There were people who said Mr. Tettin's library, at Staines, was differently furnished; but if this were so, who could assert but that the lawyer had plenty of orthodox reading in town. For he did read, Heaven only knows

where he found the time ; but he was up in all those sermons, and could talk about his "line of argument" to the most fearful bore who came to seek his advice.

Unexceptionable, likewise, was Mr. Tettin in his attire. He wore no loose coats, no fast trousers, no colored ties. Fearfully and awfully black in his apparel, the lawyer looked the very incarnation of respectability. The stiffness of his collars, the whiteness of his shirts, was something to talk about. Charms to his chain, indeed ! Mr. Tettin would as soon have thought of putting a ring in his nose. His appearance was worth a thousand a year to him, and his manners a thousand more. They were just the same to the curate as to the peer. He had no clients who were not, by position, at any rate, gentlemen, and Mr. Tettin treated them as such.

As regards all else, the lawyer, like his patrons, was as other men : he ate, he drank, he married, he had children ; he had a house at Staines, where the butcher and green-grocer called for orders, just as they do at yours and mine, reader.

He smoked decorously ; he had friends, he had tastes, and the chief of these was a liking for fishing.

Now, George Geith had at an early stage of their intimacy discovered this weakness, if such it may be called, and been able to give him some valuable information on the subject. Therefore the lawyer liked George Geith. I do not think I should be going too far if I said he was very proud of him.

For when he was once free, the accountant told the lawyer how he had made off life during his seven years of servitude ; and though in his own practice Mr. Tettin was above trade, he was not in his private capacity above admiring a man who had been able to throw aside his surplice, and make his way through life in an office-coat.

The thing was altogether beyond his experience, and he thought, and thought rightly, that the person who had done

this was no common individual, but one whom, in spite of his beard, and his business habits, and his connection with the City, he, Mr. Tettin, was quite safe in interesting himself concerning.

Wherefore he assumed pleasure at seeing the accountant once again, and inquired what he could do for him.

"I want you to find out," answered George, "whether my cousin has cut the entail off Snareham or not."

"You think he has done so; may I inquire your reason?"

"He was embarrassed, so he is married; I had cards this morning!"

"Married to an heiress?"

"No; to the daughter of my old rector, a girl that had not a shilling. That is my one reason," proceeded George; "my other is, that he did not ask me to the wedding, which I think he would have done had all been fair and above board."

"You really think so?"

"I know he would have asked me, unless either he did not want to see me on account of the entail, or that his wife's family desired my absence."

"Why should they do anything of the kind?"

"Mr. Hayles knew," was George's short reply; but it was enough: lawyer and client looked at each other and smiled.

"He knew the first part," suggested the former, "and had other daughters."

"And had other daughters," acquiesced George; and there was a moment's pause.

"I can very easily find out whether he has cut off the entail or not," began Mr. Tettin; "but of course you are well aware nothing you can do or say will be of any avail, for if he have not cut off the entail, he cannot do so now, and if he have cut it off, why, he had the power to do so, and that ends the matter."

“All I can do is to learn how the case stands,” answered the accountant, “so that when Mark and I meet, I may know what ground we are going on.”

“I understand;” and Mr. Tettin seemed by those two words to say that he had travelled over all George’s mind and knew every feeling it contained. “There is one thing I forget. Did you tell me you were next heir to Snareham, or was there any one between?”

“One between, my uncle, Mr. Arthur Geith; but that life has for years counted for nothing.”

“It does seem hard,” mused Mr. Tettin. “I hope Sir Mark has not been so unjust; but if he have, I need not remind you, Mr. Geith, that those events which seem most grievous at the time, frequently prove to have happened for our ultimate good.”

“I am aware of that, Mr. Tettin,” said the accountant, with commendable solemnity; “but still, if the choice were offered me, I would rather retain my chance of Snareham, and let my ultimate good go to the share of somebody else. It is not that I grudge Mark Snareham,” he went on, hastily, “or that I would not give him health, wealth, and wisdom wherewith to enjoy his possessions; but I do not like to think that were he to go, I should succeed only to a barren title; and over and above all, I can’t endure to see a fine estate thrown to the dogs. I do not like it, even where I have no interest in the property.”

And George thought, as he spoke, of the lands he had looked over the morning before it had come fully home to him that Snareham was passing from the Geiths as the Park from the Molozanes.

He was standing in the golden mist of the morning, surveying the scene once more; whilst the lawyer, all unconscious of what was passing through his mind, replied cheerfully, “Well, Mr. Geith, we must hope the best. At all events, I can soon ascertain the best or the worst;” and with that they parted.



Mr. Tettin proved as good as his word. It was not long before he ascertained that George's fears had proved true prophets. Snareham was free from the entail, but Snareham was not free from debt. "It will not be long before he has to sell," thought George; and he put Snareham out of his mind, and turned to his daily drudgery again.

But he was not to be allowed to forget Snareham. Before another fortnight had passed, letters came from both bride and bridegroom, informing him they expected to be in London in the course of a few days, and expressing an earnest desire to see him in Halkin Street.

"Our marriage was a hurried one," wrote Sir Mark, "and *strictly private*. The curate stood as my best man, and Cissy had only one bridesmaid, Sophia. The very precarious state of Mrs. Hayles' health prevented the fuss usual on such occasions; for which I was not sorry. The only thing I regretted was, not being able to ask you, old fellow, to come and see me 'turned off.' I have been uncertain as to future movements, or I should have written to you before. We shall be in Halkin Street on Saturday at latest, where we hope to see you for dinner."

Whilst Cissy was even more conciliatory. She entreated George to believe that, could her wishes have been followed, he would have been asked to dear Morelands, to add to the happiness of the happiest day of her life. ("I'm sure I don't doubt her," interpolated the accountant; "she would have had all the county there if they would have come.") Mark talked of taking her abroad, but she hoped they would remain in London, till her darling mother's health was completely restored; and if so, she trusted (three dashes under this) George would come and see them often, and talk over old times; ("Catch me doing it!" ejaculated George;) and consider their house his home. She hoped to hear from him, if he had a moment to spare; and expecting to see him very soon, she remained his affectionate cousin, Cecilia Geith.

“I’d a great deal rather you were my cousin than my wife, madam,” thought George, folding the billet up, and smiling that smile of his which was not pleasant to see. There had been a time when he would have kept that note in a drawer by itself, but now he cast it amongst his business letters, and sat down to answer Mark’s.

Very boldly he plunged into the difficulty, asking his cousin straightforwardly why he had not done what he had to do, openly? Why, if he must give Snareham over into the hands of strangers, he could not at least have told the person who had the nearest interest in the matter? and talked affairs over with him? “Because,” went on George, “I had at least the right of a possible heir to know what you were about to do.

“To sons and brothers the Geiths have never grudged that Snareham should pass; but you are the first Geith who ever even thought of cutting off the entail, and you ought not to have done it since it was through your extravagance, and yours only, the property became involved. Taking all circumstances into consideration, I think it better for me not to see you when you come to London; but I wish you none the less to believe you and your wife have my best wishes for your happiness.”

“Best wishes and worst fears,” thought George, as he sealed the letter, to which by return came the following answer:—

“For God’s sake, don’t tell my mother. I could not help it, George; I declare to you I could not help it. When I left your office last time, I left it resolved to retrench; resolved to ask Cissy to wait; and I did ask her, and she consented; but Mrs. Hayles, who was then dangerously ill (she is very ill still), sent for me and said she would like our engagement broken off. She declared she would not die in peace without seeing Cissy either married or free. She said Cissy was wasting the best years of her life waiting for a man who might never, after all, be able to make her

his wife ; and, on the whole, she should like the affair broken off. What was I to do, George? I leave it to you ; what was I to do? I could not marry, unless I broke the entail. I could not give her up, so I chose the former. But, on my honor, George, I meant no wrong to you ; I knew if I had no son you would inherit, and that, if I were once free from those cursed life insurances, I should be able to clear the estate in a few years, and marry and keep a wife to boot. Don't be angry, old fellow ; I will do justice to you and by you ; I swear I will. Don't make Cissy and myself wretched by refusing to come and see us. She encloses a line in this."

Which ran to the effect, that, if Cissy had known her husband was going to break the entail, she would never have married him. "I would not have let him do a wrong to any one living for my sake," wrote the lady ; "and I am so sorry, so sorry."

"That will not secure Snareham to me, however," muttered the accountant ; "and at any rate, I have no security but that she played as deep a game as her mother. Clever old lady that ! But then, to be sure, she had to deal with a fool."

Whose letter he answered thus : —

"DEAR MARK, — Although what you have done is past help, and therefore ought, according to the proverb, to be past grief, I cannot help repeating that I think you ought to have taken me into your confidence ; you *might* have married spite of the entail ; but I suspect you wanted to do that first which you were aware you could not do afterwards. It was not knowing what to do about the entail kept you single so long, that and nothing else. If you deceived yourself as to your perplexities, you did not deceive me. You are mistaken in thinking I should inherit, failing a son, because you might have daughters ; but all this is beside the real question, which is, that you have given power to your creditors and yourself to dispose of Snareham *absolutely*. You have

thrown down the only barrier which was strong enough to keep strangers off the estate; and so surely as I am writing this, Mark, so certainly will the day come when you will repent of your own act, and wish you could undo it.

"I am not angry, and I have no wish to make either you or your wife 'wretched,' but you will do very well without me, and I would rather not go to Halkin Street."

To this epistle there came no reply; and George was beginning to think he should hear nothing more on the subject, when one day Sir Mark and his wife made their appearance in Fen Court.

Prettier than ever young Lady Geith looked as she told George they had come to entreat him to be friends with them, and to let bygones be bygones.

"You will forgive and forget," said the graceful flirt; and she was so pleading, so lovely, so pertinacious, that George was glad to promise anything she asked.

"I will go and see you," he said, "though I still think it would be better for me not to do so. Business and pleasure ought never to attempt to unite. There has been a divorce pronounced between them from the beginning."

"All work and no play," began Cecilia.

"All play and no work makes a man a beggar," retorted George; "and I should take less kindly to begging even than to work."

"And these are your territories?" went on the lady, and she explored the office as though it were some strange country; and she looked at his pigeon-holes and copying-books, and inks, and diaries, and nests, and piles, as she might at the fruit hanging on the boughs of foreign trees. She walked from one window to another, and then back again; she asked questions about his neighbors, about the church-yard, about the blank black walls, about his clerks, about his business.

"Show me what you do," she said; "show me this new thing, which is better than preaching, which is going, **Mark says, to make your fortune.**"

George opened his books and showed her the means by which he made money ; showed her the endless columns, the interminable entries, the weary writing, the lines and lines of figures, until at last the bride cried out, —

“Oh ! why did you leave the Church ? why in the world could you not have remained a clergyman ?”

“I liked this better than that,” he answered, quietly.

“I would not be this,” she said. “I could not bear to pore over these books, and travel up and down those columns, for all the wealth in Lombard Street. And Mark told me, as we drove along, that there were millions and millions of money there.”

“And all those millions,” answered the accountant, “are kept together by drudgery. Some make and some spend in this world ; but it is wellnigh impossible to make and spend together. I am making now. If I have good fortune I shall spend hereafter.”

“And I am spending now. What shall I be doing hereafter, George ?” asked his cousin, laughingly.

“Repenting,” was the reply ; and George closed his ledger, as though he had just made a couple of entries in it.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## AT THE DOWER HOUSE.

ON the whole, George Geith was very glad when the day arrived for him to revisit Withefell. He said to himself that it was a confounded bore to have to leave all his town business to go poking into the entangled affairs of a country gentleman who could not trust his papers into the hands of a stranger; but still George was glad, for if he had not wanted to go, he could have declined the work.

As it was, he accepted the work, and went down to the Dower House to finish it.

Finishing, however, did not in this case prove nearly so easy as beginning; and before George Geith had been three hours engaged at Mr. Molozane's papers, he found he should either be a loser by the transaction, or have to charge his employer an exorbitant price.

It was one of those pieces of business which he was in the habit of taking in tow and doing at his leisure: when no person's books wanted balancing, no man's schedule haunted his sleep.

No money could pay him for going down to Withefell, and setting Mr. Molozane's house in order. Was it possible for him to devise any plan by which he might at once do justice to the squire and himself? Could he leave town every night and sleep at Wattisbridge for a month? Could he reëstablish his health and get through Mr. Molozane's business at one and the same time?

If the gentleman would wait his convenience, George

thought the thing might be managed; and accordingly he broached the subject whilst he and the squire were wading together through the accounts.

"As you like," answered Mr. Molozane. "I am in no hurry to know the worst: providing the thing be done. I am not particular as to when, only you must stay here; you must consider this your inn for the time being."

"But when I am making this arrangement solely to suit my own convenience," expostulated George.

"I presume I may make an arrangement to suit my own pleasure likewise," finished Mr. Molozane. "We'll just settle the matter at once, Mr. Geith. Come when you like, go when you like, finish when you like."

And thus George Geith was made free of the Dower House, and soon became quite one of the family.

Looking back, he could not believe his host to be one and the same with the man who had walked into his office nine months before with such a haughty mien, with such unconciliating manners. He could not identify Mr. Molozane at home with Mr. Molozane abroad. He could not understand how the fences had come to be broken down between them; how Mr. Molozane could regard absolutely in the light of a friend one whom he had once treated somewhat as a servant.

The accountant could not know that Mr. Molozane felt this silent, untiring, clear-headed, hard-working man ought to be able to keep the evil to come away from his threshold, or, if that were impossible, would tell him how best the evil might be met.

He was so thankful to have an adviser, a helper, a man who mentally was a self-reliant giant, that he ran to extremes in the matter, and thought in George's presence there was safety, in his absence danger.

Besides, he liked his new acquaintance better than any friend or neighbor he possessed.

He could talk to George without the necessity for con-

stant concealment ; he could be silent without exciting remark ; he could be worse than silent — dull, and still the accountant knew the why and the wherefore, and was not surprised.

Further, though Mr. Geith was in business, he yet possessed the manners and feelings of a gentleman. How he had come by those manners and feelings, Mr. Molozane did not know, and George did not enlighten him ; but they were pleasant to the squire anyhow ; and he took this new acquaintance into favor without stopping to consider why he did so, or how it all might end.

He liked George and made him welcome ; and George liked his quarters, and made himself at home. For a time, of course, the accountant went through the ceremony of deceiving himself, of mentally saying it was a bore to have to leave town, a nuisance having to relinquish paying work for unremunerative ; but after a very little he grew honest, and acknowledged that his life just then was a pleasanter existence than it had been for years.

It was more cheerful certainly, for no place could be dull in which Beryl Molozane abode ; and as he got more and more at home, so Beryl unveiled before him, and showed this old man of the world what he had never seen before — a perfectly natural light-hearted girl.

Who was as bright as the sunshine, as gay as a kitten ; who thought no more what any one thought about her than if she had been only three years old ; who took Mr. Geith into her confidence, and made the Dower House a home to the homeless man.

By degrees, too, Miss Molozane's ice thawed, and she began to treat George with such favor as showed she had ceased to think of him as an accountant, and had come to understand he was a man.

Whilst for Louey, she made no secret of her liking, but said openly, and in the face of the family congregation, she thought Mr. Geith nicer than anybody she knew, Mr. Wern



not excepted. And, up to this point, I may remark, Mr. Wern, of Molozane Park, had been the god of the young authoress's idolatry.

To work in that house was not easy; to work the whole day through, a thing not to be dreamed of; and with dismay George saw that the progress he was making was of the slowest.

Very conscientiously he pointed this out to Mr. Molozane, and entreated permission to take the papers with him to town; but this the squire would not allow.

Perhaps he saw from George's manner that he was by no means loth to stay; that he found the country air beneficial; that the natural atmosphere he was breathing seemed pleasanter and purer than all. Anyhow, he entreated him not to trouble himself: to come when he could, to stay away when it was more convenient, and to be satisfied Mr. Molozane was very glad for him to remain, and should be very sorry when he had to go.

Thus it came to pass that the accountant grew more and more with every member of the family; that he shared their merriment, knew their anxieties, and began to understand what home really was.

"Should he ever feel happy out of one again?" the lonely man asked himself, whilst leaning out of his window, looking at the park as it lay bathed in the silvery moonlight. "Am I wise?" he thought; "am I safe?" and he sat down and pictured Matilda Molozane and her beauty till he concluded he was not safe, that he must depart at all hazards.

Then he ran on to other matters; all, however, connected with her. Why was she better dressed, better instructed, better cared for, than any one else about the house? How did it happen that, in spite of the close economy practised in the house, — an economy which the Molozanes were either too proud or too frank to endeavor to conceal from him, — the beauty seemed to know no lack of anything? For Beryl

and Louey, muslins and prints, bonnets apparently home-trimmed, mantles he himself had seen Beryl making. For Miss Molozane, the richest of dresses, the most fashionable of bonnets, the most delicate of gloves.

Except good wine and heavy plate, there was nothing in or about the house such as might have been expected in the house of a man who still held a good position in the county, and was known for miles around as "the Squire." The furniture, though handsome, was old; the curtains were faded; the carpets threadbare. There were but two female servants and one man about the establishment; and as for the table, the fare satisfied George, who was not particular; but many a London shopkeeper would have turned up his nose in contempt at the plainness of the fare with which the Molozanes were perfectly content.

It was not that the viands were ill-cooked, or bad served. It was merely that at every turn economy was practised; and that luxuries of all kinds the speculative but conscientious gentleman eschewed.

And there were signs and tokens also which proved that this economy was not a matter of recent growth; that Beryl had told him the literal truth when she said one day, —

"I have never known what it is to have money all my life, Mr. Geith. We have been short ever since I can remember anything."

She said it laughingly, making light of her little domestic anxieties; but George remembered the sentence, and puzzled himself about the apparent incongruity there existed between Miss Molozane's belongings and her father's means.

Almost as if she had guessed what was passing in his mind, Beryl came to him next morning, when he was standing on the lawn, watching the groom exercising her sister's horse, and said, with a slight flush on her cheek, —

"I have often thought, Mr. Geith, that horse must puzzle you; but perhaps you know it is not ours: it is Mrs. Elsenham's. Mrs. Elsenham is that delightful old grandmother about whom you have heard me talk."

“Would it be impertinent for me to inquire why Mrs. Elsenham does not provide a horse for you likewise?”

“Certainly not. I shall be delighted to tell you about Granny, because I hate her. It is a comfort to meet with any person to whom I can say fearlessly, ‘I detest my grandmother!’ and I give you fair warning, Mr. Geith, that if you say it is wrong of me to do so, I shall hate you too.”

“Then assuredly, whatever I may think, I shall keep a discreet silence,” he answered.

“But you must not think; at least you must not think differently from what I do. Granny is the most detestable old woman that ever lived! The first time Tilly is out of the way, I will show you Granny exact. She and I have been at daggers drawn since I can remember anything.”

“And is that the reason she does not let you have a horse?” asked George, anxious to draw her back to the point whence they had started.

“Not at all: the reason of that is — but I think I must begin at the beginning, and tell you a little piece of our family history. I do not see why you should not know what all the parish knows, a great deal better than its alphabet.”

“I have no claim to be told anything, however, Miss Beryl,” remarked George, virtuously.

“I never said you had; but I should like to tell you; and then, no matter what you see about the house, you will not be astonished. Papa would tell you, only that it is a sore subject, for he hates Granny more than I do. She took him in; she cheated him, in plain words, Mr. Geith. But for Granny, we should have been still up at the Park, and I should never have been talking to you here.”

If she expected her companion to regret this, she was mistaken. Perhaps she did not; at all events, she proceeded, —

“I should tell you, Mr. Geith, that I scarcely remember my mother at all. Indeed, I question if I should recollect

her, but that my memory has always been refreshed by that portrait which hangs between the dining-room windows. She must have been very like Matilda, I think. Papa says she was handsomer, but I scarcely can imagine that. You think Tilly very handsome, don't you, Mr. Geith?" \*

Was this chit of seventeen trying him? Did she want to get at whether he cared too much for her sister or not? Had she guessed he stood in danger? Was she warning him off the track?

All this passed through George Geith's mind as he answered, with an amused smile, that he did consider Miss Molozane very beautiful — more beautiful even, in his opinion, than the portrait in the dining-room.

"Thank you, Mr. Geith," said Beryl, simply; and she thought for a moment before she went on. "After all, it is not so easy to tell a story," was her next sentence, and she laughed and colored at her own awkwardness. "In some respects it is not a pleasant story, and that makes it more difficult for me to know what part to put first. Before papa came into the Park, it was embarrassed; but everybody thought his wife's fortune would more than set him straight. You must have heard of Mr. Elsenham, who made such a gigantic fortune out of bandana handkerchiefs. He was a niggard father; and as he had but two children, a son and daughter, people thought papa would be better off than any Molozane had been for centuries.

"During his lifetime Mr. Elsenham would make no settlement on my mother. He allowed her six hundred a year, and he used to give her splendid presents (we have some of her jewelry now); and it was an understood thing that when he died she was to have a third of his property. When he did die, however, it turned out that his wife (that's Granny, you understand) had got him to leave every half-penny under her control. She was a lady who liked power, and everything was for the future in her power. I do not say the disappointment killed my mother, but it certainly

hastened her death. She died when Louey was born, and then Granny stopped the allowance altogether, and has kept it to herself ever since."

"Do you know Mr. Molozane never had any part of his wife's fortune — that Mrs. Elsenham has made no arrangement about you?"

"Oh! she has arranged! — I was going to tell you about that," replied Beryl. "My uncle Harry died before his father, leaving one son. This son, Richard, has been brought up by his grandmother, who is going to do great things for him; and she proposed, years and years ago, that Dick should marry Matilda, and the money be thus kept in the family."

"And Mr. Molozane?" asked George.

"Papa did what was right, as you might be quite sure he would," answered Beryl, whose cheeks were by this time crimson. "He would not have Matilda bound by any such arrangement, till she was old enough to decide for herself. And Matilda has decided, and they will be married whenever Richard comes of age."

For a minute there was silence. With all his self-command George could not make an indifferent remark on the subject; and had he been more at ease himself, Beryl's visible embarrassment would have rendered it difficult for him to know what to say.

They had wandered during the conversation from the lawn to a walk which wound away by the side of the park, and Beryl was now leaning on the oak paling that separated her old home from her present one, with her face buried in her hands.

Was she crying? and if she were, what was the cause of her grief? Had she cared for this cousin? Had there been any quarrel between her sister and herself? Was it the old, old story, of young people thrown together, of hearts exchanged without permission, of an engagement being forbidden, of a union proving impossible? Was this young thing, gay as she seemed, really in trouble? Had she been called

on to give up, without a murmur, all the hopes of her life? And was she, now in the life-spring and promise of her existence, weeping over withered flowers?

Thinking this, there came a dangerous longing into George Geith's heart to comfort her, to tell her what he knew about life; to assure her that so long as men and women will battle against grief for themselves, so long likewise God in his mercy permits the sun to rise for them after the darkest nights of misery and despair humanity knows.

Many a word which he could not have spoken in the days when he was a clergyman, when consolation was his office, comfort his business, he would willingly have poured out then. Many a sentence which he had learned out of the great lesson book that the Almighty opens for us all, clerical or lay, occurred to him then; but he was wise, and held his peace. There was nothing in all Beryl had told to warrant observation from him; and although he felt, or fancied he felt, at the moment, the same longing to comfort the girl as a father might comfort his loved child, he luckily remembered he was not her father, and Beryl not a child.

"You know now," she went on after that pause, uncovering her face, but still not looking at him, but letting her eyes, wet with tears, wander out over the park,—"you know now why Matilda has everything different from us. It is not her fault, for Granny insists that the future Mrs. Elsenham shall have all that befits her station. I should have thought," added Beryl, with a fire in her eyes which seemed to dry the moisture out of them in an instant, "that a Molozone needed as much as an Elsenham, any day; but I suppose gentry can afford to do without things that parvenus can't."

"My sister must have that horse and groom; my sister must be dressed like Solomon in all his glory; whilst Louey and I are simple as the lilies of the field. Would I do it?" and Beryl clenched her little hand. "Would I do the bidding of any old woman? Would I be a slave for the sake of any amount of money that could be offered to me?"

She was so vehement that for the life of him George could not help laughing, even whilst he answered, —

“ Perhaps you would not be a slave for the sake of money; but you might for the sake of some one you cared for very much.”

“ I do not think I should; but, at any rate, it would not be for the sake of Dick Elsenham. You will see him to-night, and a very nice kind of person you will see, if you are not at all particular.”

“ Why, what kind of person may he be?” asked George.

“ He is this,” said Beryl, pulling off her bonnet, and running her fingers through her hair; “ and he is this,” and she stroked an imaginary moustache; “ and he is this,” and she caressed her soft cheek; “ and he is this,” and she drawled out her words with an affected lisp; “ and he is this,” and George absolutely started at the sudden insolence and assurance of her manner; “ and he is this,” and she drew back like a sullen coward; “ he is a fop; he is a fool; he is a bully; he is — to be my brother-in-law,” and Beryl lifted up her head like a young war-horse scenting the battle afar off.

“ Is there no help for it?” George inquired.

“ Yes; if you can give us back the Park free from mortgages; if you can give us horses, carriages, servants; beyond all things, money,” she scoffed. “ Mr. Geith, you must not think Matilda mad, when you see Richard. She has been with my grandmother most part of her life, off and on I mean, and she cannot endure what we can. Short means are a wretchedness to her. She has always been accustomed to have everything she wants. She likes gayety. It would be a living death to her to have to stay here always. Besides, she does not dislike Richard as I do. She likes him. If she did not, if it were only for the money she was marrying, I know a man that, were I in her place, I would chose before Dick twenty times over. I had rather hear his grammar than Dick’s drawl. I should prefer his stories to Dick’s oaths. You will hear Mr. Richard Elsenham swearing,

morning, noon, and night ; but you must never mind him, Mr. Geith ; no matter what he says or does."

George bit his lip ; he was coming now to an understanding of what the young lady meant — of what she was entreating at his hands.

"Would it not be better for me to go?" he asked ; "and return when Mr. Elsenham leaves?"

"I do not know when you would return then," she answered ; "for he lives here nine months out of the twelve. Either here or at Wattisbridge, I mean," she added, "which is much the same thing."

"I wonder if Mr. Molozane would allow me to take the necessary papers to town?" he said.

"Do not ask him ; pray do not," she entreated. "If you knew what a comfort it is to papa to have anybody to talk to whilst Dick is here, you would never think of going. Besides, if you begin with my cousin as you mean to go on, you will have no trouble ; only you must not mind him, even though he should be tiresome sometimes."

He made no answer till they had paced the whole length of the walk, and were almost at the house again. Then he said, —

"Is it to be peace at any price, Miss Beryl?"

"If you can manage it, Mr. Geith, I shall be very grateful."

"Then I will try," he said ; and the girl left him and ran in.

Just then, out came Miss Molozane in her riding-habit ; with her coquettish hat and drooping feathers ; with her light riding-whip and her flowing veil. She was looking out for George to help her to mount. It was a duty he had taken kindly to ; and, to say the truth, Miss Molozane did not object to the attention in the least.

There were so many folds in the habit to be properly arranged ; there was so much nicety required about the curb ; the reins were so often twisted ; and the girths needed



such close inspection, that this business of mounting had come to be quite a serious affair,—a something which occupied a long time, and gave opportunity for a considerable amount of innocent flirtation.

On the occasion in question, as George knotted up the curb rein to the particular length desired by the fair equestrian, as he patted the arched neck of the beautiful animal she rode, a thought passed through his mind as to whether he should declare boldly to her who he was, and try to go in and win this prize.

But, pooh! what chance had he? What was his birth in comparison to Elsenham's money? what his possibilities beside Elsenham's certainties? and, even if he had a chance, were these grapes worth climbing after?

They were very nice to look at; but George did not know much about how they would taste as a form of refreshment for life. He had his doubts; he was not a young man in feelings, ideas, experience, or even age, you remember, my reader; and though he seemed to have taken a fresh lease of youth at the Dower House, he had still his experience of former tendencies to fall back on in case of need. He rather thought Miss Molozane might not be worth the trouble; and already the fancy he had felt was passing away from him as quickly almost as the lady was disappearing down the avenue.

"She rides well, don't she, sir?" said a voice close beside him; and turning, he beheld Mr. Molozane's factotum, groom, gardener, coachman, standing at his elbow. Standing with a cloth in his hand, with which cloth he was in the habit of giving a finishing polish to any bit, buckle, or stirrup, that might seem to stand in need of such attention.

"I taught her, I did; when Master lived at the Park, I taught her. It was me first held her on a pony. Yes, she do ride well; and that's a nice thing she's on. Mr. Elsenham, he rides well too.

"They make a handsome pair, they do; but I know, if I

was a gentleman, which I would choose. I'd never take Miss Molozane whilst Miss Beryl was single; and I've known them both since they was as high as my knee, I have."

"Does Miss Beryl never ride at all?" asked George, as much perhaps in order to turn the conversation as from any desire for information.

"Not often; her pony can't hold foot with the chestnut. When Mr. Elsenham is here, he sometimes gets her to try one of his horses; but Miss Beryl is afraid now. He has served her such tricks, she has a dread of being thrown. He says he wants to make her sure of her seat; but I know better. It is just his jokes," muttered the old man, as he shuffled away; adding something under his breath, which was not, George suspected, a blessing on Mr. Richard Elsenham.

"I'd like to catch the fellow playing any tricks with her," thought the accountant, as he sat down in the library, and commenced sorting over the papers: "I'd duck him in the nearest horse-pond."

From which expression it will be seen that the promise of peace at any price Beryl had wanted from her new friend was not altogether unnecessary or uncalled for.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## QUITE AT HOME.

WHEN a young lady has from the age of fifteen been in the habit of managing her father's house, directing his servants, and making arrangements for the reception of his guests, her manners naturally become formed much earlier than would have been the case under ordinary circumstances: more particularly if the said young lady have from her earliest infancy been deprived of maternal guidance, and freed from that constant contemplation of what is proper and improper, which it seems the especial province of mothers to force upon the consideration of their daughters.

It may be rank heresy, but I hold to the belief nevertheless, that if girls be nice at all, they are nicer when they are allowed to grow up with their feet out of the stocks, and their figures free from backboards.

It is pleasant to see a young girl starting in life without picking her steps too much; and young ladies who know all the pitfalls and quagmires of this wicked world, are apt to lose in simplicity what they gain in propriety. Mothers wise in their generation, who are acquainted with the evil, and the sin, and the sorrow, are so anxious to keep their girls from the appearance of evil, that they will not suffer them to be natural.

They forget, God help us, what one would think they ought to remember with thankfulness, that there is a time when it is as natural to the young to be frank and open as it seems to be afterwards to the old to be masked and veiled. They will not let well alone. They will have every word,

look, action, ruled by line and plummet. They leave nothing to impulse, because, as I have said before, they forget there is a time when impulses are not all sinful, when it is natural to the young to laugh and be glad as it is to the lark to sing.

Which brings me back to what I meant to say at first, viz., that George Geith thought Beryl Molozane would not have been half so pleasant a girl had she been brought up under the eye of the stately beauty whose portrait hung in the dining-room.

He knew no mother would have suffered Beryl to wander through life at her own sweet will in the manner Mr. Molozane permitted. But still Mr. Geith had long since doubts as to whether a more properly trained young lady might not have plunged headlong into errors which Beryl avoided. She was no flirt — she never appeared embarrassed. George had seen a good deal of the world, and he had certainly never been in a house where there seemed more union amongst the members of the family, and from which the mystery and wickedness of ordinary life was better excluded. Between Beryl and her father, indeed, there existed such perfect sympathy, such a thorough understanding, that George felt sure the girl would do nothing, say nothing, think nothing, which she would hesitate to confess to him present on the spot. Indeed, in this way Beryl was a little provoking; because once or twice when she had talked to him, as George in his vanity thought, confidentially, he was astonished afterwards to find her repeating almost the same sentences in her father's presence, without the slightest idea that she was disappointing one of her auditors.

A girl who took this new acquaintance into her confidence, just as if she had known him all her life; who talked before him about her slightest housekeeping troubles; who mimicked their acquaintance, hitting off each person's oddities with a dangerous power of mockery; whom he would meet in unexpected places laughing till the tears ran down

er cheeks; who was like a kitten, everywhere at once; who was not a young lady, nor even a girl, but just a child in everything save the power of keeping the house in order, and of making things comfortable for those about her; a merry drudge; a laughing grisel, whom the servants loved as very few servants love any mistress nowadays;— how could a man help liking this young thing, thinking of her, speculating about her future?

Whom would she marry? Would she settle down into respectable matronhood, and become quite another creature in the space of a very few years?

Would she marry a rich man, or a poor? Would she ever become fashionable, ever learn concealment, ever become different to what she then was? Somehow George found her future horrible even to picture. He could not fancy hard times laid on her— always young, always laughing. He could imagine her going singing away through life; but he could not imagine her changing— becoming cold, worldly, calculating.

Thinking of the girl, now laughing inwardly at the recollection of some queer speech, some expression of anger, now remembering all her unselfishness, all her charities, George found that he was making very little progress with his accounts, and that if he was ever to get them finished he must stay more in the library, and not permit himself to be so frequently beguiled to leave that retreat for the pleasanter sitting-room of the family.

So to work he went in earnest; toiling through the long hours of that summer day, laboring with the windows open, and every external sight, and sound, and perfume tempting him out into the open air. He would not leave off even for luncheon, — the pleasant meal which had always hitherto made such a delightful break in the hours when he had spent whole day at the Dower House.

To be sure, he did not gain much by the move, for Beryl herself brought him what he asked for — biscuits and water;

called him unsociable, an anchorite, a hermit, and then went and gathered him fruit, which she laid on the table, nestling amongst the leaves of the mulberry and the vine.

Fruit is not a thing which even anchorites find it easy to resist. Fruit cannot be eaten like biscuits, with pen in hand and eye on paper, for both which reasons George was obliged to cease from labor and talk whilst he refreshed himself. Then Mr. Molozane came in, and settled down ostensibly to read the paper, but really, as it seemed, to hinder George getting on with his business. Nevertheless, he did make considerable progress, and would have worked straight on till it was time to dress for dinner, but that at about five o'clock Beryl appeared at one of the front windows opening on to the terrace, entreating him to cease writing before he grew into a machine.

"How you can go on, on, hour after hour, I cannot imagine," said this sturdy young woman.

"How you can live out of the sunshine, away from the flowers, puzzles me. Why, even Louey leaves her manuscripts; she is here now. Do come out; I wish you would."

"We sha'n't be able to enjoy ourselves much longer," observed Louise, who had a wide-brimmed straw hat tied over her cap. "When once Dick comes, we shall soon have his grandmother, and then there will be a pleasant houseful."

"I always enjoy myself when Granny is here," said Beryl; "I don't know when I have greater fun."

"Because you are always mimicking her. Mr. Geith, Beryl walks into the room behind grandmamma, on tiptoe, mocking her all the time. She has been nearly caught, over and over again; indeed, she was once, for Granny saw her in the glass."

"I wonder if I dare," said Beryl, looking round. "Louey, is Matilda out of the way? Now, Mr. Geith, here is Granny;" and Beryl, gathering up her dress in both hands, straightening her back till it was as flat as a table, drawing up her neck, and stiffening her limbs, sailed up and down

face with all the pomp and majesty of an ancient lady, was fairly overcome by the ludicrous contrast between her and the woman she was making believe to be, had to sit down on one of the terrace seats, where he laughed as he had not laughed before for years.

"Why do you inquire, sir, what is amusing you so much?" said she, stopping short in her walk, and asking the question in her grandmother's very voice.

"Oh, my gracious goodness! here is Tilly. Well, Tilly, and how are you?" And she went sailing up to him, and bestowed upon her a most impressive salute. "Beryl, how can you?" exclaimed the beauty. "What do you and Mr. Geith think? How can you be so absurd?"

"I am only moulding myself after a most desirable model," said Beryl, still in her cracked, old woman's voice; "and I do not think Mr. Geith or any other mister may think what he thinks. When I am in the path of duty, the remarks of other people will not fail to affect me in the least. I suppose Maria's mother may walk up and down her own terraced walks, and draw down the impertinent comments of stran-

Beryl was off again, sweeping, rustling as she went. "You ought not to laugh, Miss Molozane, I know," said she, apologetically.

"Once, Mr. Geith, you have arrived at a just conclusion, and remarked Beryl, severely, as she moved past.

"It is not possible to help laughing at Beryl," said Miss Molozane; "that is the worst of it; and our laughing enables her to do and say things she would never otherwise do. You know, Mr. Geith, she ought not to mimic her grandmother, and" —

"Once for all, young woman," interrupted Beryl, tapping her shoulder with a gesture George knew must have been copied from life; "once for all, young woman, understand that I did not choose *my* grandmother, and that I maintain a right to mimic her if I choose. *You* may have

chosen *your* grandmother, and if so, I don't think much of your taste; let that settle the question there." And Beryl opened and shut her eyes once or twice imperatively, and balanced herself on her heels, much as a parrot balances itself on its perch.

"You will get us all into some frightful scrape," observed Miss Molozane, dolefully.

In a moment Beryl dropped her grandmother, and was her own proper self again.

"How shall I get you into a scrape?" she asked. "Can Granny kill us? Can she send us to the Tower? Is she our queen? are we her subjects? Does she pay our debts? Does she do anything but make herself as disagreeable as she knows how, when she comes down here? Get into a scrape! I wish I could keep her out of the house by getting into a scrape, that I do!—yes, that I do!" And Miss Beryl's cheeks flamed, while she stamped her little foot on the ground, to add emphasis to her words.

"But would it not be wise to cease talking about her when she is not here?" asked her sister.

"Do you want me to go into a thousand pieces when she is here?" asked Beryl. "Do you want me to explode with pent-up wrath and indignation? Should you like to see me in bits—a leg here and an arm there? If so, you will tell me to hold my peace about Granny. If I could not say I hated her, I should die; but as it is, the thought of the fun I can make of her enables me to behave with civility when she is in the house."

"You do not know how civil I am to Granny, Mr. Geith, and she can't bear my civility or me either."

"And she can't endure me," put in Louey.

"But you wrote a poem about her," said Beryl. "She did, indeed; and, as it happened, the poem got into Matilda's desk, which she lent one day to Granny. Matilda is exceedingly ready to lend things to Granny, I may remark; and the delightful old lady looking for note-paper, she says, —"



but, as I believe, rummaging for secrets, — came on this poem and read it, and had us all in and interrogated us, and sent for papa ; and we had such a to-do.”

The poem began —

“ At Hammersmith there dwells a dame,  
Maria Elsenham is her name,  
And ” —

“ Beryl, I desire you to stop,” broke in Miss Molozane. “ Mr. Geith, you might tell her how wrong it is. Perhaps she will listen to what you say, though she will not attend to me.”

“ Miss Beryl, I really do think,” began George, but she interrupted him with —

“ You need not go on. I know all you are going to say much better than you do yourself. You were wanting to tell me about gray hairs and young heads. You were about to say that Granny must be a lady of the highest respectability and wealth ; and that my conduct amounts to sacrilege. You were going to tell me the fate of those children who mocked Elisha ; and to inform me that people who ridicule others are often ridiculed themselves : but it is of no use. No matter what is right or what is wrong, I must laugh at Granny ; and for anything else I don't care.”

“ Do you know what happened to ‘ don't care ’ ? ” asked Miss Molozane.

“ There have been so many ‘ don't cares,’ ” retorted Beryl. “ There was one ran away to sea and was drowned ; one fell among savages ; one was eaten by a lion on the coast of Africa (I would tell you what part of the coast, only I don't know that myself) ; and another happened to have a sister called Matilda. Her fate was the hardest of all, I think — But I hear horse's hoofs ; I hear Sultan trotting up the drive ; and I know Dick is coming, and I am not dressed to receive him. There, Miss Matty, that is your fault — there.” And Beryl pulled a grimace.

“ Do you know whether papa is in the house ? ” asked

Miss Molozane, who colored perceptibly at Beryl's intelligence.

"I don't know, and I don't care," murmured that young lady. "Dick will be sure to find us out. I am not going to meet him, Tilly, if that is what you are looking so pitiful about. If you think it necessary for any one to ask him to make himself at home, you can go and do so yourself."

"We had better go in," suggested Miss Molozane.

"Not at all; I am very comfortable where I am. Ah! here he comes;" and at that instant George heard the library door fling open; then an audible "Where the devil are they all;" which sentence was immediately followed by the speaker, who stepped out on to the terrace and greeted his cousins with —

"Well, girls, how are you?"

"We feel a great deal better now you are come," answered Beryl, demurely; and she held out her hand to the young man, who evidently considered that his relationship justified a warmer salutation, which he might have exacted, but that at the moment he caught sight of Mr. Geith.

There was a supercilious lifting of his eyebrows, a contemptuous measuring of the stranger's social standing, an unqualified stare of amazement; and then a look towards Beryl which said as plainly as a look could, "Who the deuce is this fellow, and what is he doing here?"

"Mr. Elsenham, Mr. Geith," Beryl answered; and thereupon the two gentlemen bowed.

"You must have found it very warm riding this afternoon," remarked the accountant.

"Infernally," was the reply; and Mr. Elsenham took off his hat as he spoke.

"You are covered with dust," said Louise, with the air of a person who considered she had made an original observation.

"These cursed roads are always dusty," Mr. Elsenham graciously answered.

"Most roads are so when they are not muddy," opined Louise; at which speech the young man laughed.

"Have you written any proverbs since I saw you last, Solomon?" he asked. "No? Nor finished the tragedies; nor made a better Paradise than Milton's? You lazy little wretch. I'll see that you work whilst I am here. And when are you going to get rid of that cap. I give you fair notice I shall set it on fire;" and he was making a step towards the girl, when Beryl interrupted him.

"I can't have it, Richard," she said. "You shall not torment Louey. Let her cap alone, and her too."

"It is such an outrageous thing," he observed.

"Nobody asks you to wear it," she retorted; and then the idea of Dick in a cap so overcame her, that Miss Molozane felt constrained to interfere and rebuke her sister severely.

"Know this part of the country well?" asked Mr. Elsenham, turning towards Mr. Geith.

"No, it is quite strange to me; and I am not likely to know it much better, for I am only here on business."

"Humph," grunted Mr. Elsenham; and he took a comprehensive glance round the party; after which he said, "that business must be a damned bore, though, thank the Lord, he knew nothing about it save by report."

"It is lucky for you that your grandfather had a close acquaintance with it," remarked Miss Beryl.

"It is well there are some people in the world who will work like galley-slaves," answered Mr. Elsenham. "I'll be hanged if I would!"

"Would you rather starve, Dick?" asked Louise; whereupon the young man told her to "shut up"; and inquired if Mr. Geith would have "a weed."

The politeness being declined, Mr. Elsenham lit a cigar for himself, and asked where his uncle was.

"He is gone to the Park, I think," answered Miss Molozane; upon receiving which information, her cousin at once turned to Beryl with —

"And how is Mr. Wern?"

"So far as I know, he is quite well," she replied.

"And how far do you know?" he asked, taking the cigar out of his mouth, and putting the question in a tone which George by no means approved.

"The last time George was at the Park, he made no mention of Mr. Wern being ill. As you seem particularly interested about him, however, perhaps I had better send Fragby up to inquire."

"I'm not interested in the fellow, hang him! I don't care a damned sixpence whether he is ill or well. Have you seen this Withefell saint, Mr. Geith? And what do you think of him?"

"I have not seen him," answered the accountant, "nor heard of him, save from Miss Louise."

"You should get Beryl at the bellows then. Who is wise, holy, good? Mr. Wern. Who is well-informed, well-bred, well-travelled? Mr. Wern. Who never swears, never is out of temper, never damns his servants? Mr. Wern. And, if I may add so much on my own account, who is the most cursed hypocrite, the most confounded upstart, the most intolerable prig? Mr. Wern!"

"It would be a blessing for us if you were only like him, instead of being what you are — a slanderer of a good man, before whom you dare not say the things you say before me!" panted Beryl.

"Ah! Mr. Geith, that is all very fine, but don't let it impose upon you. Beryl abuses me in company, but you cannot imagine all the nice compliments she pays when we are alone;" and Mr. Elsenham puffed a cloud of smoke out of his mouth, and watched it curling up into the silent air.

If ever Mr. Geith felt a desire to kick a man, it was at that moment. He would have liked to thrash the fellow, and thrust him neck and crop off the premises. He longed to pick a quarrel with him, to get an opportunity of telling this new-comer what he thought of him, his manners, and

his speeches; but he luckily remembered his promise to Beryl, and biting back his words, kept peace.

"You are fortunate," he said; "with many relatives the process is inverted."

"Do not attend to what Dick says, Mr. Geith," interposed Louise; "he and Beryl quarrel more when there is nobody by than they ever do before people."

"That's all you know about it, Solomon," remarked Mr. Elsenham: "Beryl and I have been friends and cronies ever since she wore a short white frock and a sky-blue sash. We robbed birds' nests together, pelted the ducks, laid trains of gunpowder under the cats, chased the fowls, and frightened old women. We quarrelled then. I have a vivid memory of long scratches on my face, for scratching and pulling my hair was Beryl's way of showing fight. We quarrel still; but we were good friends then, and we are good friends now, are we not, coz?"

"Capital at a distance," answered Beryl, who was by this time almost at a white heat.

"And near at hand, too, *ma mignonne*," retorted Mr. Elsenham. "What a heavenly day this is, to be sure. Have you had Zillal out, Matilda?"

"Yes, I had a long ride," answered the beauty; "but I must get out for the future either earlier or later. The evenings would be the pleasantest time, I think."

"I can assure you they would for me," observed Mr. Elsenham. "Never could see the fun of getting up early in the morning; never could see the beauty of sunrise and dew-drops, and all the rest of the rubbish;" and Mr. Elsenham knocked the ashes off his cigar, and waited to hear if any one would contradict him.

No person did, however; George had made up his mind not to argue with Miss Molozane's *fiancé* if he could help it. He saw he was an individual who the more he was contradicted sought all the more occasion for argument; and the accountant was determined to keep his promise and his temper if he could.

Which forbearance brought its own reward, for Mr. Elsenham took an opportunity of remarking to Miss Molozane that for a tradesman Geith seemed a devilishly decent sort of fellow; appears a confounded deal too much at home with you all, though. Wonder at my uncle allowing it. Has he been making love to Beryl?"

"Making love to Beryl!" and Miss Molozane opened her fine eyes in astonishment.

"Damn it, you did not think I should imagine he had been making love to you," retorted her betrothed. "I don't see any symptom of softness, remember; but still I thought I'd ask the question."

"How could such an idea enter your head?" asked Miss Molozane. "The man is well enough for his station; but he is only an accountant; he is only here on business."

"He seems to find his business remarkably pleasant," said her cousin; and who could say but that his idea was correct

"One cannot have a person in the house and not speak civil sentence to him," observed Miss Molozane.

"Did I say you could; but that is different. Here I find you all gathered together on the terrace, talking, laughing, making yourselves as agreeable as may be, to a man about whom my uncle knows nothing, except that he can add up a column and cast accounts."

"He had been hard at work all day," Matilda explained; "I think Beryl coaxed him out. She never likes to see any one working too much."

"Beryl again!" muttered Mr. Elsenham; "Beryl will get herself into a mess some of these days, if she does not take care."

"I shall begin to think you are in love with Beryl," said Miss Molozane, with an angry flush. "You seem to think no soul should come to the house but yourself. Last time it was Mr. Wern; now Mr. Geith. Pray, let Beryl manage her own affairs; she is quite competent to keep herself safe without your help. You ought to have more considera-

tion for her than even to mention her name in the same breath with Mr. Geith; who may be a respectable married man for anything we know to the contrary."

"Stuff!" exclaimed Mr. Elsenham. "The fellow is not married. He knows a precious deal too well how to make himself comfortable amongst single women to have any tie at home."

"That may be your opinion," said Miss Molozane; "but Beryl has always declared he was either married or a widower."

"Who was either married or widower?" asked Beryl, entering the drawing-room with Louise at the moment.

"Mr. Geith. Richard says he is sure he is nothing of the kind."

"Shall we ask him, Dick?" inquired Beryl. "Louise could easily inquire how his wife supported his long absence. Could not you, Louey?"

"Which of you, should I say, wanted to know?" demanded that young lady.

"You could say we were all dying to become acquainted with Mrs. Geith," suggested Mr. Elsenham; "and that it would add greatly to the pleasure we are all deriving from her husband's society, if she could be induced to come to Withefell with him."

"You might add, also, Louey," said Beryl, "that Dick is wearied of our society, and wants something fresh."

"He stops at the 'Stag,' I suppose?" went on Mr. Elsenham. "You could tell him there is capital accommodation there for families; church close at hand; doctor over the way."

"He does not stop at the 'Stag' at all!" exclaimed Louise. "He stops here."

"In this house?" demanded Mr. Elsenham. "Do you mean he eats, drinks, sleeps here?"

"To be sure he does," answered Louise. "Where else would you have had him eat, drink, and sleep?"

"Well, I'll be hanged if ever I heard anything like this!" cried Mr. Elsenham. "My uncle must be stark staring mad. He had better send round the crier and gather in all the tramps in the country. I must speak to him about it."

"If you want to do so," said Beryl, "you'll find him in the library with Mr. Geith."

"Oh! I am not going to say anything before the man. What, in the name of Heaven, Beryl, do you think I am made of, to imagine I'd insult him in that way?"

"I had not the slightest idea what Mr. Richard Elsenham's exquisite tact might suggest as the proper course," retorted Beryl, with a courtesy. "But see! there is papa in the garden; you had better go to him and get it over at once."

Taking the hint, Mr. Elsenham walked out to his uncle and began.

"About Mr. Geith" —

"Well, Richard."

"The girls tell me he is staying here at present."

"What then?"

"Do you think it well, considering his station in life?"

"Sir!" and Mr. Molozane faced round on his nephew.

"I only meant to say," went on Mr. Elsenham.

"Say nothing," interrupted his uncle; "that is, say nothing, if you intended for a moment to dictate whom I should or should not ask into this house. If I like to invite a groom to dinner, it is no business of yours. It is optional with you whether you choose to meet him or not."

"But considering my engagement to Matilda?" suggested Mr. Elsenham.

"That engagement was none of my seeking," answered his uncle; "and if it had not been, it would still give you no right to meddle in my concerns."

"But surely, sir, I may give an opinion concerning the acquaintances of my future wife?"

"You shall not express any opinion to me concerning



the acquaintances I introduce to my daughter," thundered Mr. Molozane; "so long as she lives under my roof she shall be civil to my guests; and so long as you come here I shall look for a similar courtesy to them from you."

"I have certainly no intention of being rude to Mr. Geith," answered the young man, meekly; "and when I spoke I was not thinking so much about Matilda as about Beryl."

"Which of my daughters is it, Mr. Elsenham, that you are going to do me the honor of marrying?" asked Mr. Molozane. "If it be Matilda, may I request that you will cease troubling yourself in any way about Beryl's prospects? From the curates at Wattisbridge up, you have always fancied every man you have met here wanted to marry Beryl; and once for all, Richard, I tell you I have had enough of this. Do not compel me to express my wishes on this subject again."

"But may I not ask you, sir, whether you know anything about Mr. Geith? About his"——

"That is the way to Wattisbridge," said Mr. Molozane, cutting across his nephew's speech; "and there is the way into my house. If you are going to meddle in my affairs, I must request you to take the former; but if you decide on remaining here, you can only remain on the terms I have mentioned. Mr. Geith is staying in my house as my guest, because it suits us both that he should do so; and unless you intend to treat him as your equal in all respects, it would be better for you to return to London."

"You shall have no reason to complain of any want of civility on my part," said Mr. Elsenham, sullenly. "I like the fellow well enough; I only thought it right to tell you my opinion."

"Having told it to me, you had better let the subject drop," answered Mr. Molozane; and the two went in to dinner.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## HAPPINESS.

TAKING it as a whole, Mr. Geith did not find that the new-comer interfered in the slightest degree with his comfort or convenience. Nay, rather as the days went by, it seemed as though Mr. Elsenham's presence made the former social freedom greater, and tended to establish the accountant more firmly in his host's favor.

Owing to some curious perversity, Mr. Elsenham took kindly to the man he had wanted to get out of the house. For a couple of evenings he had been cool, not to say sulky; but after that, satisfied perhaps that George neither meant nor was doing any harm, he was graciously pleased to unbend towards him, and evince such courtesy as he could.

If such a thing were possible, there was more life about the Dower House after his arrival than before; what with Beryl and Mr. Elsenham quarrelling, Beryl and Mr. Elsenham disputing, Beryl and Mr. Elsenham laughing, the place was never quiet. From first thing in the morning till all separated for the night, the house was never still. When he left for St. Margaret's, when he returned from town, George heard the same pleasant clatter of tongues; without which he found his London office silent and lonely.

Light-hearted youth! Shall we not bare our heads, and thank God for your cheerful tones, your sunny smiles, your happy carelessness? Shall those who have passed through the heat and burden of weary days not thank the Almighty for suffering the cool breath of morning to fan their cheeks

once more? Shall the old not be grateful for having the burden of years pushed aside for a moment by young and eager hands? Shall they not gaze gladly over their once familiar prospects, even though their eyes be wet with tears; and if in the young God be pleased to give them back their own far-away youth for a season, shall they not bask in the sunshine, and listen to the pleasant joy-bells, murmuring the while a trembling thanksgiving?

My readers, pardon me if I linger over this summer-time too lovingly; over those hours which were full of such a delicious sweetness, that George Geith might have been pardoned had he wished to die then, and escaped in the midst of his joy from the chance of the dark and evil days to come.

There are some landscapes from which it is hard to turn our eyes; some lands from which we are loth to turn our feet; some places where we have been so unutterably happy, that they seem to float in the sunbeam forever after. Like the hills lying under the blue summer sky, like the sea spreading in sunlit glory, like fields and trees bathed in the living beauty of morning, was that time to the man whose youth was past.

Had he ever known youth? he asked himself as he drank in the wine of that, to him, strange vintage. Had he ever been young, ever been gay, ever been happy, like those people by whom he was surrounded?

Light-hearted youth! the stern, grave man yielded to the charm of your spell; you laid your load upon him, and behold! the years vanished, and you gave him back the days gone by.

Light-hearted youth! How shall I chant your praises? by what means can I echo the sound of your glad voices? how may I tell of the smiles, discourse of the laughter, show to deaf ears the magic influence you possess; persuade those who frown at your gayety how good a thing it is for us to be near the young, and to join in their mirth?

Shall we put old heads on young shoulders? God forbid! Shall we tell of the night to day, or speak of winter to the spring? Rather, oh friends! shall we not think in the darkness of the light, in the sun of the sunshine, and retrace our own steps, sooner than drag the young from the happy fields, where they wander among flowers, to the dusty roads and the barren highways along which manhood plods its way?

This was a glad time to George Geith; one in which he lived so fully in the present, that future and past seemed alike indifferent. Such hours as those, bathed in sunshine, steeped in honey, men who have passed their first youth know how to value, because they know, also, how seldom they may return. Holidays may come, summer after summer, to the schoolboy; but holidays to be enjoyed are rare in after-life. For this reason manhood gathers all flowers of happiness that come in its way, with such eagerness of pleasure as can only coexist with pain. It has no spare buds to fling away; no such profusion of garlands that it can afford to leave one to wither. The simplest wild-flower is to it as the costliest exotic; and there are no neglected roses, no drooping lilies, no withering leaves strewed carelessly along the path which has been trodden by the feet of middle age.

I do not know how it is that there are some middle-aged people who do not care for morning, or spring, or youth, or happy voices, or ringing laughter; who regard gayety as an insult, merriment as a weakness, happiness as a frivolity; who care for nothing in their daily life but food and raiment, and dreary dinner-parties, and what they are pleased to call sensible conversation; who think there is no wisdom in smiles superior to their own sedateness; who believe that the Lord Almighty, who made the flowers to bloom, and the trees to blossom, and the birds to sing, did not intend likewise the young to be gay and happy of necessity, and the old to be gay and happy likewise, if they found it possible to float with light hearts over the waves of the ocean of life.

George Geith, at any rate, was not one of those who could neither rejoice nor let others do so.

He had suffered, he had worked, he had led a lonely, weless life; but yet, when those children with whom he was thrown piped unto him, he was ready to dance to their strains.

Happy holidays! Would I had space to linger over those unlit hours! Spite of the frowns of readers, of the rebukes of critics, I could bask in that summer glory forever, and chronicle the events of each passing hour with the loving arrularity of age.

Happy holidays! — in which, though it might be the school-children were not all good, all innocent, they were yet all happy and noisy as crickets; when one would have imagined there was no such thing on earth as care, no such shadow as ruin hanging over the Dower House; when it was illness, jesting, laughing, walking, riding, all the day long; when even George's reluctant labor seemed industry itself, when compared with the labors of those about him.

Never, since he began business, had a summer brought so little work with it to him.

Everybody seemed to be out of town, — abroad, at the sea-side, in the Highlands, at Killarney, or the English lakes. Scarcely any books needed balancing; there were no schedules to prepare; but few columns to add up, and accordingly, it came to pass that after a time the accountant did not go often into town, but remained much at Withefell, arranging Mr. Molozane's affairs.

How he managed to get those affairs into order, it would be difficult to tell; for it was against the wishes of the whole family that he did any work at all.

"What a pity it seems for you, Mr. Geith, not to be enjoying this lovely weather," Mr. Molozane would say.

"Ah! do come out," Beryl would plead, laying her hand on his papers, and taking possession of his ink.

"We are going away for a long walk," Mr. Elsenham

would observe; "you had better come, too, before your feet grow to the carpet." Whilst Louise was more peremptory still, and would as coolly take up her position in the library, and announce her intention of giving Mr. Geith "no rest" till he left off work, as if it were in the right and natural course of things for a business-man to be tormented to death by a miss in her earliest teens.

"I shall certainly have to lock you out, Miss Loo," George would threaten.

"I should come in through the window," retorted Louise, from her favorite perch, which was one of the steps of the book-ladder.

"I must then fasten the window," remarked George.

"And draw down the blinds, and close the shutters, and get in candles," suggested Louise. "Short of that you will not keep me away. I will have you out; you shall not sit here the whole day long, write writing, add adding, till you drop down dead."

"But you write," said the accountant.

"I write for pleasure; my writing is very different from yours," answered Louise, with dignity.

"So it may be; but still I am able to make my business my pleasure too."

"Then it is not good for you to have so much pleasure," said the young lady; "and you shall come out into the garden. I cannot imagine what flowers, and fields, and trees, were given people for, if they never look at them."

"Some people look at them, if others do not," George answered; "just as some people see the Pyramids, whilst others never so much as hear of them."

"That is no reason why you should mope in the house all day; do come out: if you don't come fast they will all be gone; for Beryl is going to ride to-day."

"What is she going to ride?" asked George.

"Her own pony. What else should she ride? Perhaps you would like to see her mounted on the top of Dick's Giraffe."

"Indeed I should like to see no such thing," answered the accountant, as he dipped his pen in the ink, and prepared to commence work again.

"Are you not coming after all?" demanded Louise, descending from her perch, and looking at him as though he had done her some injury.

"I shall come to see them start, if you allow me," he answered; "but I must finish what I am about now."

"You are a monster, and I cannot bear you," said Louise.

"I have Scripture on my side, at any rate; and I must try to support your displeasure."

"Scripture — what Scripture?" demanded the young lady.

"I shall not tell you," answered George; "but if you can find out for yourself, I'll say whether your guess be right."

"But — do — do — do," pleaded Louise.

"Surely you would not have me tell untruth; and I said you must first guess," he replied. "And now, Miss Loo, do run away; I can't get on with a thing whilst you are here."

"But I may come back when I guess."

"If you do not come back too often," he answered; and Louise left him.

During the next hour she was in about every ten minutes, proving wrong every time; until at last, after a longer absence than usual, he heard through the open window an argument on the terrace outside.

"You shall not."

"I shall."

"I won't be friends with you, Loo."

"Then don't be friends."

"But it is so naughty and unkind of you."

"Naughty, indeed! Who put it into my head? I had forgotten till just now; and I am so glad you reminded me of it."

"I declare, Loo, I shall tell papa."

"Do, and I shall tell papa too; but I shall first ask Mr. Geith. Beryl says, Mr. Geith," she continued, putting her head in at the window, "that your text is, 'Resist the devil and he will flee from you.'"

"Never mind her, Mr. Geith," put in Beryl; "she is talking nonsense."

"Never mind Beryl, Mr. Geith," said Louise; "she is telling fibs."

"I shall box your ears, Miss," threatened her sister.

"And, Mr. Geith, do come here for a minute," entreated Louise.

"Now, Louey, you might for once do what I ask you," interposed Beryl.

"Dick and Beryl want to know," went on this *enfant terrible*, "how Mrs." —

"I'll tell you what we said, Mr. Geith," broke in Beryl: "Dick thought you were not married, and I thought you were; and then I remarked that if he liked, Louey might ask which of us was right. But I never meant her to tell you; and she knew I did not;" and Beryl looked as if she were going to cry about the matter.

"They were arguing again this afternoon," explained Miss Louise, who, being somewhat curious on the subject herself, was determined to have her say out.

"Dick said 'he'd be ——,'" and Louise nodded her head significantly, "'if you were married at all;'" and Beryl said she was sure you were, that she had never been mistaken yet; did not you, Beryl?"

But Beryl was gone. Failing to still her sister's tongue, the next best thing seemed to be to get out of the way of hearing it.

"Dick laid five to one," ran on Miss Louise, "and Beryl bet a pair of gloves and her riding-whip, to show she was in earnest. So, which wins, Mr. Geith? I am to have a sovereign out of the five if Dick be wrong."



But Mr. Geith would not say which was right. "You would be too wise if you knew everything, Miss Louise," he observed.

"But I should like so much to know," she urged.

"And I should like so much not to tell you," he answered, "that I must hold my peace; besides, it would be such a pity for your sister to lose her whip."

"Then you are not married?"

"Or poor Mr. Elsenham to have to pay five pounds," went on George, coolly.

"They could not both lose, you know," said Louise.

"Yes, they might," answered the accountant.

"How might they?"

"If I were divorced," he answered.

"Oh, my goodness gracious!" exclaimed the young lady;

"I believe you are."

And she rushed straight off to Mr. Elsenham, with

"You've lost, Dick, — he's divorced!"

"He's your grandmother!" retorted Mr. Elsenham.

"He is not; I wish he were, instead of the one I have got! But you've lost. Give me my sovereign."

"Who said I had lost?"

"He said you would both lose if he were divorced."

"Ifs might fly, if they had wings," remarked Mr. Elsenham. "Now, Loo, be off, and tell those sisters of yours to make haste. The horses will be round in five minutes."

"But, about my sovereign, Dick?"

"Earn it, young lady," was Mr. Elsenham's advice; and he forthwith lit a cigar and walked away, smoking, as usual, down the avenue.

By the time the ladies were ready, George came round to the lawn to see them start.

"That's not much of a steed, is he?" asked Beryl, patting her pony's neck, — a civility which Trot returned by taking her habit in his mouth and making believe to chew it. "I am always miles behind everybody."

"Because you ride so slowly," said her cousin.

"Because you ride so fast," said Beryl.

"What a deal of good a gallop would do you, Geith," remarked Mr. Elsenham. "What a pity you do not ride."

George could not help smiling at the observation; and it was such a strange smile in which he indulged, as he stooped and pretended to be adjusting Trot's bridle, that Miss Moll ozane said, —

"Perhaps Mr. Geith does ride. I believe none of us here have asked him."

"Faith! perhaps he does, though it's not much of a city accomplishment. Do you ride?" And Mr. Elsenham turned, with his foot in the stirrup, to ask the question.

"Yes, I have ridden," answered the accountant.

"Any brute like that?" inquired Mr. Elsenham, pointing to the Giraffe, which it was about to be the groom's privilege to mount.

"No, not much like that; for an uglier animal I never saw."

"He is a rare fellow to go, for all that. Should you be afraid to venture your neck on him?"

"Not in the least."

"If you are sure of that, come with us. Take care how you get up. He's a devil to kick."

"Let him kick," was Mr. Geith's philosophic answer.

"Have you ridden in the circus, old fellow?" asked Mr. Elsenham, when he saw the accountant fairly settled in his saddle.

"I have ridden across country, which I suppose is something the same thing," retorted Mr. Geith.

"After the hounds?"

"Do people generally go across the country before them?" inquired George.

"Hang it, no! I meant, have you been in the habit of hunting?"

"I was, years ago."

“Where? In the neighborhood of London?”

“No; in Bedfordshire.”

“Is that your county?”

“It is not the county where I was born; but it is the county where most of the Geiths have lived.”

“You don’t mean that you are one of the Geiths of Snareham?”

“Would there be anything wonderful if I did?”

“Are you any relation to Sir Mark Geith?”

“Only his cousin.”

“Good Lord!” ejaculated Mr. Richard Elsenham. “How does it happen that you are an accountant?”

“If I were inclined to be polite, I might ask how it happens you are a gentleman at large,” asked Mr. Geith, with a slight sneer.

“You deserved that, Dick,” said Beryl. “What affair is it of yours what Mr. Geith chooses to be?”

“It is, perhaps, not my choice, but my necessity, Miss Beryl,” observed George, reining in his horse beside her; to which the young lady replied in a low tone, something about her cousin being always inquisitive and impertinent.

“I shall come to you, Beryl, when I want a thoroughly good character,” said Mr. Elsenham, who caught some part of her sentence. “If I have offended Mr. Geith, I am sorry for it. Would you wish me to say anything more than that?”

“There was no reason why you should have said so much,” answered George, laughing. “I am not ashamed of being connected with the Geiths of Snareham; and I am still less ashamed of being an accountant in the city.”

Whereupon Mr. Elsenham was so good as to assure their new companion that he meant for the future to forget all about the city, and his business too.

“But I cannot agree to that, Mr. Elsenham,” answered the accountant. “The city has given me a home; my business has provided bread and cheese; and I am not going to

follow the example of the citizens, and despise the  
has kept me off the parish. Business is a capital in  
and the city is a place where any man with pluck  
dustry may push his way. The city is the proper  
younger sons to emigrate to, if younger sons could  
induced to think so."

"Bravo, Mr. Geith!" said Beryl, clapping her  
which demonstration caused the Giraffe to plunge fra  
and induced Mr. Elsenham to remark they had bette  
a little faster, and breathe the horses before they  
troublesome.

## CHAPTER XX.

## BERYL'S ADMIRER.

It was not long before Beryl's pony fell far behind the rest; so far, indeed, that whenever Mr. Geith could pull in his horse, he turned and rode back some distance to meet her.

"Never mind me," said Beryl; "go on with the others, and I will overtake you when you commence walking."

"As if it were probable I should leave you," answered George; and the pair rode on in silence for a minute or two.

Then, "I like," began Beryl, "to hear a man stand up for his business, as much as I like to hear people stand up for their country. I think if I had to earn my bread I should feel the dignity of labor so strongly that I should quarrel with any one who disputed it. We have some neighbors who talk about the city as if it were a den of thieves, and who, although every sixpence they have was made in trade, could not think of putting their sons to business. They were happy to have had fathers who were not ashamed of trade. But for that, they would now be poor enough."

"They merely assume, however, the general prejudice of society," remarked George.

"Do you not think they create that prejudice for themselves?" she asked. "The outer world can know nothing of business, except what it hears from the initiated; and if the initiated declare it is all roguery and vulgarity from

chapter to chapter, what is society to say? Remember, Mr. Geith, I believe in business, and I only wish I were a man to show what business could do for Molozane Park. I have thought a great deal about business lately, and I see that if trade were not always providing money for the aristocracy, the aristocracy would soon go down to the lowest depths of poverty. Look at the Park, Mr. Geith: if we were there now, we could do nothing for want of money; but as it is, Mr. Wern keeps up a fine establishment; gives plenty of employment; is good to the poor; is hospitable to his neighbors. I am sure," went on the poor little girl, with a trembling in her voice, "it was a good day for Withefell when the Molozanes left the Park, for we were not rich enough to do anything for any one — not even for ourselves."

"Mr. Wern, then, is very rich?" asked George.

"Nobody knows how rich," answered Beryl, with a sad look in her brown eyes as she spoke. "He is a chemist, and has made — oh! such a fortune! His father was a chemist also, but he never got on like his son. He could buy the Park to-morrow, papa says, and never miss the purchase-money."

"And he is as good as he is rich?" suggested George.

"I could not tell you, Mr. Geith, how good a man he is," said Beryl, earnestly. "Dick laughs at me for praising him, but I cannot help saying what I think, — that he is better than any one I ever knew. I do not know how it happens that you have never met him, for he comes often to see papa. That is the principal entrance to the Park," she added; "you have never seen it before, and I declare there is Mr. Wern himself!"

Beryl was right: there was Mr. Wern. Mounted on a strong iron-gray horse, he was coming slowly down the long avenue bordered with elms; but at sight of Beryl and her companion he quickened his pace.

"We will wait for him," said Beryl, with the utmost composure; and what could her companion do but follow suit? —

nothing loth, to say truth, for he was curious to see Mr. Wern, and he had now a capital opportunity of doing so.

A light-haired, fair-complexioned, gray-eyed, middle-aged man, to whom Beryl was, George Geith saw at a glance, sun, moon, stars, and planets; whilst, as for Beryl herself, the accountant might as soon have tried to understand the sphinx as the face of the young lady by his side.

Did she care for this millionaire, or not? Would she marry for an establishment? Did she understand what all that devotion of manner, all that repressed eagerness meant? George began to ask himself these and fifty other similar questions almost before the first greetings were over — before he himself had been introduced to Beryl's friend.

Was the little lady, when all was said and done, hankering, like other people, after loaves and fishes? after the flesh-pots of Egypt? after the gold, and the station, and the influence which confer advantages not to be despised? That she cared for Mr. Wern, George did not credit; but he was commencing almost to believe that Beryl was not blind to her own interests; and he thought, for a moment, that perhaps she was exalting this man into a god, so as afterwards to excuse her own worship of him. Poor Beryl! the day came when this old, uncharitable man of the world knew her better; but that day was not the one on which he rode along the Hertfordshire lanes, listening to all Mr. Wern had to say to her.

Very much in the way Mr. Geith felt, and he wished in his heart that one of the three was absent — either himself or Mr. Wern; but as it was, so it was; and he heard the decorous talk about the poor and their wants, their sickness, their improvidence, their necessities, which had been so familiar to him once, in the days when he was professing to serve another God than Mammon.

In that one time, as at the other, George found the talk detestable. There are those topics which, to a man of his nature, must always, I suspect, prove wearisome, viz., ser-

vants, children, and the poor. He never could understand the interest people took in any of them ; and for the moment he felt inclined to hold with Mr. Elsenham that the Witefell saint was an awful humbug, and a tremendous bore.

Beryl's propriety likewise was something dreadful to contemplate. Not once, but fifty times, George had heard her making fun of the very men and women in whose behalf she was now so eloquent.

She had been good enough to imitate old Mrs. Mear's whine, Job Darth's stammer, Mrs. O'Rourke's brogue, and Mary Hurst's snuffle. She had gone over every soul in the village, *seriatim*, mocking their peculiarities, hitting off their characteristics, baring their falseness, and yet still here she was, riding along with as demure a face as though she had never ridiculed any living being.

"And about Bearn's rent, Mr. Wern? I believe he is now in constant work?"

"I can't stand this any longer," thought George, and thought it with the addition of an oath ; and while Mr. Wern was answering, he struck his horse stealthily yet sharply, causing him to dance and curvet across the road.

"You have not a very quiet animal, sir," observed Mr. Wern ; in answer to which Mr. Geith muttered some almost inaudible reply, whilst he struck the horse again, reining him in tightly as he did so.

Straight up went the brute on his hind legs, and forthwith Beryl became alarmed, and cried out, —

"You will be killed! pray don't strike him; you don't know what horrid tempers all Dick's horses have."

"I know this is rather an awkward animal to manage at a walk," answered George, not without a certain satisfaction; whilst Mr. Wern said courteously, he thought in the stables at the Park he might surely find something to suit him better, and that he hoped he would come and take his choice.

Just then Mr. Elsenham and Miss Molozane appeared in



sight. "They had come back," they said, "to see if Beryl and Mr. Geith were safe;" and they shook hands with Mr. Wern, and remarked on the heat of the weather, and the beauty of the day, with most praiseworthy politeness.

By-and-by Mr. Elsenham and George dropped behind, Mr. Wern escorting the ladies in front.

"So you have been favored with a sight at last," remarked the younger man, when they were out of ear-shot.

"What do you think of Beryl's saint?"

"That he is like all other saints," was the reply.

"In what respect?"

"Too much — too good — too much like an old woman," said George, as he touched his horse with his whip again.

"Now, I tell you what, my good fellow," cried Mr. Elsenham, "if you try that you 'll come to grief to a certainty; Giraffe won't stand it."

"Giraffe must stand it," was the reply.

"But he rears."

"I know he does; he was rearing a few minutes since."

"And why can't you let him alone?"

"Because I am sick of being quiet; because I am tired to death of this place; because I hate talk about the poor."

"Hear, hear!" said Mr. Elsenham, approvingly.

"Why in Heaven's name," went on the accountant, "can't they get their wine and their jelly, and their physic and their clothing, and their alms, without such an everlasting clatter about their wants? I'm sure I should think it trouble enough to see to their necessities without having to talk them over afterwards."

"Damn the poor!" said Mr. Elsenham, with great gusto.

"But after all, the poor are sometimes only made the pretext, as in the present case. Over tracts, flannel petticoats, and beef-tea, Beryl and Mr. Wern carry on their courtship. If ever she marries that pope she and I are quits, for there will be no fun and no life in her afterwards."

"Miss Beryl might do worse, nevertheless," remarked George, sententiously.

"That's the deuce of the matter. If the man was poor one might find something to say; but as it is, so it is."

"Gold wins the day all the world over," remarked the accountant; and he thought of the man beside him whom Matilda was going to marry, and of the man riding in front with whom Beryl was coquetting.

For what else could he call it? If she liked him, why did she not encourage him? If she did not like him, why did she praise him up to the skies, and listen to him so demurely?

He was trying to solve what we have all tried vainly to solve sometime or another,—the enigma of a neighbor's heart. He was judging of its works from the way he saw the hands moving. He thought he knew all the wheels within wheels that were spinning round in the girl's mind, and accordingly, because he would not acknowledge that man knew nothing of man, he judged, as we all judge when we condemn others besides ourselves, wrongly.

In the midst of our sin, in the midst of our folly, in the midst of our weakness, there is one consolation of which the preacher never tells us, namely, that it is not with man, but with God, the last sentence rests. How would it fare with us if our neighbor had to dispose of our souls? if he had to tell our mysteries, recount our deeds? I think about this when I hear man's verdict — man's righteous verdict according to man's light — on the thief and the murderer. I think that another volume which is to us a sealed book has been read up on high, and that the other side, over which, it may be, angels' tears have fallen, has pleaded before the only tribunal where all man's misery, his temptations, his antecedents, his weaknesses, his terror, his blindness, his feeble strivings after light, are fully understood.

Is this talk about a girl and her lover too grave? I believe not. There is not a relation of life in which we are not given to judging over-righteously.

There is nothing which offends humanity so much as the loneliness of its fellow human being. Though we look over our sins, dry our own tears, smile our proud smiles, talk our lightest words when our fellows come near to probe the wounds we would cover away from sight, we are still angry and offended because they will not tell us of their ailments, because the cry of mortality in its bitterest anguish is ever, "Leave me with my God" — its most earnest prayer to its eager fellows to be left alone — alone!

I think it must be greatly for this cause that we like the young; because, even though the pages of their book be blank, we are permitted to look over them. And it might be for the same reason, viz., because she was young, that George Geith, who had his secret coffined and buried, was angry with Beryl for being what he called double-faced; for hearing her little by-play, too.

Practical man as he was, he never paused to ask himself what all this interest meant, what all this jealousy indicated; but talked on in his anger, while shallow Dick Elsenham read him through and through, and thought, with a half-compassionate contempt, that it would be rather good fun if the one business-man tried to cut out the other. He knew, or thought he knew, George would have no chance with either father or daughter; though, to be sure, the Snareham relationship put a new aspect on affairs. He might as well inquire a little further into that.

"I forget what relation you said you were to Sir Mark Geith," he said, as they rode still behind the others.

"Cousin," was the reply. "His father and mine were brothers."

"Then you are the next heir, I suppose."

"Not I! There is a certain uncle; there are probable children; there are twenty other things between me and Snareham."

"Sir Mark is not married, though?"

"Is he not? He and his wife, at any rate, were at my office not a month since," said George, almost rejoicingly.

"You seem to take a wonderful interest in my relations, Mr. Elsenham," he added. "May I inquire if you know any of them?"

"I have met your cousin," answered the other, slowly. "I have met him where I think he was making his money spin. He plays infernally high, Mr. Geith."

"I suppose he has a right to do what he likes with his own," answered George.

"You do not appear particularly to care about him or his doings," remarked Mr. Elsenham.

"I care enough," was the reply; "but what would you have? Mark's way and mine lie in opposite directions. I can't leave my path to follow him; and if I could I am not aware that he would thank me for my pains. There is too wide a distinction between us for there to be much sympathy."

"Do you know much of him?" asked Mr. Elsenham.

"Had we been brothers I could scarcely at one time have known more," was the reply; "but there comes a day, as you are aware, when the rich and the poor must separate; and that day came long ago to us. He turned to his pleasure, I to my business; and every year as it passes by must separate us more and more."

"He was a good-hearted fellow, I think," said Mr. Elsenham.

"Never a better breathed," answered George.

"Could not he have got you some appointment?" asked Mr. Elsenham.

"My dear sir," said George, with a look of the most profound compassion, "I do not want an appointment. I hang on my own hook, which I find a great deal stronger than any hook could be that was put up for me by another man."

"But the social standing," suggested Mr. Elsenham.

"Social standing is success," answered the accountant, with a smile. "The incarnation of social success is riding before us. When I am rich enough to live in a place

Molozane Park, I shall have secured my standing like-

"What are you two talking about?" asked Miss Molozane, turning at the moment to speak to the pair, who had usually been drawing nearer and nearer to their commissions.

"About the poor; about the rich; about business; about city," replied her cousin.

"Somewhat unusual subjects for you to discuss, are they?" inquired Mr. Wern.

"I believe so," was the answer; "but getting into good company makes even fools wise for the time being; and Mr. Geith's conversation is of so practical a character, that I don't choose but follow suit."

"Mr. Geith affects the city a little, I think I have understood," remarked Mr. Wern.

"Mr. Geith affects that which butters his bread," replied the accountant; "no more, no less. Though it is but a vicium which has been allowed me, I am still thankful not have to eat my morsel dry."

"A sensible man to be a younger son, is he not, Mr. Wern?" demanded Mr. Elsenham, stroking his moustache. "If work were not such a confounded bore, he would almost persuade me to visit your El Dorado, and see whether I too could not work a gold mine. It is a great thing to be earnest in anything, is it not? See how soon he has made a disciple of me."

Doubtfully Mr. Wern looked from the one man to the other before he said, —

"I did not think it had been possible to convert Mr. Elsenham; and I congratulate you, Mr. Geith, on your success."

"Mr. Geith has the true missionary gift," remarked the younger man. "He knows how to stroke his cats without hurting their hair the wrong way. Ah! if missionaries could only comprehend the way of the grain, what a number of pussies they might have purring after them."

"Pussies have claws; so your simile is unfortunate, Dick," said Beryl.

"But with judicious management, claws may be cut, Miss Beryl," suggested George, who took pleasure at the moment in following his companion's lead. "I must, however," he added, "disclaim Mr. Wern's implied compliment on my success, for I have achieved none. It might happen that Mr. Elsenham and I agreed on a few points, and went together into them."

"You and Dick agreed!" said Beryl, with a look of astonishment. "On what points, may I ask?"

"It is not good for little girls to know too much," answered her cousin; "and, besides, I want to ask if we are to get home to-day; because, if we are, I think we had better alter our pace."

"My road lies to Withefell Hall," said Mr. Wern, "so I will not detain you longer;" and he forthwith shook hands with the ladies, and, touching his hat to the gentlemen, before raising it in final salute to the party, turned out of the sunshine to let them pass.

"A good riddance," observed Mr. Elsenham, who was striving with all his might to accommodate his horse's long trot to the awful little canter of Beryl's pony; "when Mr. Wern takes up his parable, I always long to send him a gown and bands."

"And when I hear you talking against him, I always long to ornament you with a pair of donkey's ears," said Beryl pettishly.

"Mr. Geith was so charmed with his conversation," went on the young man; "he likes the poor so much, and thinks stories of their thrift and providence and necessity so interesting and so instructive. The contrast, likewise, between Beryl a sinner and Beryl a saint was delicious. Why are you not a saint at home, cousin? You have no idea how much nicer we should all think you."

"I won't ride with you any more; I won't speak to you

I hate you, Dick," said Beryl, and she pulled up her pony short.

"Not you," answered her cousin, taking Trot's rein, and pulling him into a gallop; "you like me a precious sight better than you like Mr. Wern, when all is said and done."

"I do not; I can't bear you; and I never could; and you sha'n't pull my pony; and I will go home by myself."

"Would it go home by itself? and would it tell its papa that bad people teased it when it was a saint? and said it had two faces, one for a wicked world, and one for the immaculate owner of Molozane Park? and would it cry, and look pitiful? Will it dry its eyes on Trot's mane? or shall I go after Mr. Wern to perform that operation for it?"

"I'll tell you what I shall do when I get home," said Beryl; "box your ears soundly."

"If it would improve your temper, box them now;" and Mr. Elsenham stooped down his head to receive the threatened punishment; but Beryl would not be appeased. She rode steadily on; both hands on her reins, looking straight ahead, till she suddenly turned to George and said, —

"And you are just as bad as Dick. I thought better of you, Mr. Geith, I did."

"Now, it is your turn," remarked Mr. Elsenham; "give it to him well, Beryl; you don't know half he said against your idol."

"I said, Miss Beryl, that which I am prepared to stand to," observed George, who was never slow to take up the cudgels in his own behalf. "I never could see, and I never shall see, the good of talking so much about the poor: I was not particularly impressed with Mr. Wern — not at all interested in his conversation; but, at the same time, I do not doubt his being a most excellent man; and am willing to admit that my want of appreciation may arise from a want of taste."

"He wearies me," said Matilda; "how Beryl can listen to

him as she does is a complete puzzle. For my part, I think he has completely destroyed the pleasure of our ride."

"You need n't have come back to ride with him," pouted Beryl.

"We will remember your hint next time," said Mr. Elsenham; but Beryl would not answer, nor take any notice of him. She was looking with such a reproachful expression at the accountant that his heart melted towards her, and he felt bound to do battle in her behalf.

"If I recant, may I be forgiven, Miss Beryl?" he asked, in a low tone; and the result was what might have made many another swear black to be white; for she pulled her pony away from Dick, and riding round to the other side of Mr. Geith, took refuge between the hedge and Giraffe.

"I am very sorry to have offended you," he said.

"It was not your fault; you do not know Mr. Wern as I know him. When you do, you will think differently."

"I am ready to think differently now, if you desire it," remarked Mr. Geith; whereupon Mr. Elsenham laughed, and declared the accountant was as great a humbug as Mr. Wern, — a compliment which that gentleman received with perfect temper.

"If I were only as good," he began.

"It would be well for you," finished Beryl, snappishly; and the short-lived truce was broken.



## CHAPTER XXI.

## BERYL EXPLAINS.

**T**HERE was one comfort with Beryl Molozane, that, if she had little fits of ill humor, she did not stay long in them; and if she had periods of gravity and propriety, they were short in comparison with the long summer days, which she could fill with laughter and glee.

Always after she had got up on a pedestal and made a saint of herself, Beryl was sure to plunge into deeper depths than ever of fun and mockery. If she could once be got to laugh, all her solemnity vanished, and the house rang again with the sound of her mirth.

And a dull house it would have been without Beryl, as George Geith, sitting over his papers, acknowledged. She was to that place what the breath of life is to the body: the moving power, the animating cause, which kept the blood flowing through the veins, and smiles brightening the face. Her voice seemed never silent; her tongue never still. From the garden her gay tones came into the room where the accountant sat at work; lingering amongst the roses he found her when it grew too dark for him to see to do more.

"We are going to have a visitation on Monday, Mr. Geith," she said. "Granny is coming — Granny and her train."

"Her train?" repeated George, who was a little mystified.

"Yes; Granny, like other great ladies, can't travel without one; and she would bring more people, only that papa

won't have them here. As it is, she has her maid and Mr. Elsenham — old Mr. Elsenham I mean, her brother-in-law — and old Mr. Elsenham's man; and she comes in a great chariot, which puts up at the 'Stag,' at Wattisbridge, in company with her coachman and two footmen. She brought her butler down the last time, but I do not think she will try that again. He had a great deal to say to our cook about there being no servants' hall, and at last came to me, to observe he had not been accustomed to it."

"Did he tell you to what he had been accustomed?" asked her companion.

"No; I did not ask him, or probably he would; but I told him I was very sorry, and that if he had any suggestions to make as to what he would like, I should be glad to hear it. The beauty of it was," went on Beryl, "he knew I was making fun of him, though he could not find a word to say, except that 'No; he had no suggestion to make.' Then, said I, I do not see what I can do, for I am afraid grand-mamma might not like me to have you in the drawing-room; but if you choose, I will ask her."

"What did he say then?" inquired Mr. Geith.

"He did not say anything to me," answered Beryl, "but he went straight off to Granny, and gave her notice; and she actually raised his wages and prayed him to stop; and he was graciously pleased to consent, only papa said he should not stop here; and so she had to send him back to London, and I wish they would all stay there."

"Why does she not come by the Eastern Counties line?" asked George, with a natural wonder that any one who could help it should put herself to so much trouble.

"For three reasons. One, she dislikes all railways; another, she can't get to the Shoreditch station without crossing the city; and a third, she thinks she creates a sensation by coming down with as great a clatter as the lord mayor. The people about here think she is mad; that is all she gets in the way of public opinion out of her four horses."

"You don't mean to say that she travels with four horses?" said Mr. Geith.

"She would travel with eight if she could manage it," answered Beryl; "Granny is essentially — but you will see that she is for yourself when you see her. Meantime, I am so glad you are going to stay here to-morrow, so that we may have one day of peace before she comes."

George was glad too; and the intimacy between himself and the family at the Dower House had by this time become so close, that he never thought of uttering those courteous expressions of pleasure, regret, and so forth, which do good duty at the commencement of an acquaintance, but which seem such trumpery coin when acquaintance has ripened to something more, that friend never thinks of offering it to a friend.

Accordingly, George Geith did not say he was glad — he, indeed, should he — when he knew that Beryl was perfectly well aware he was pleased to stop.

Thinking of his lonely Sundays in town, thinking of his lonely evenings in Fen Court, thinking of the days when he had not a soul to speak to whom he liked, nor a house at which he cared to visit where he was sure of a welcome, the accountant sometimes became almost unmanned, and wondered how he should be able to endure the old desolate life when he had to return to it in earnest once again.

It is not sorrow, nor toil, nor anxiety, nor difficulty, which tries the strength and endurance of a man like George Geith; it is rather joy and happiness. All the world over, natures like his prove the truth of the old fable, in which it is not the strong north wind that beats down the traveller, but rather the beams of a genial sun.

Man bears that trouble to which he is born better than the glad sunshine for which he had no right to look; and it had come by this time to such a pass with George Geith, that, standing in the light, he dared not look forth at the darkness to which, sooner or later, he knew he must plunge.

And these Sundays at the Dower House were so pleasant! when he could take his rest without any twinges of conscience about work neglected and hours wasted; when he could loiter over his dressing, listening to the insane cooing of the pigeons and the prating of the hens; when he did not consider it his duty to hurry over his breakfast, but could enjoy to the full that sunny morning room, which always in after-years came back to his memory with open windows and floating muslin curtains; when the talk was so pleasant, the air so balmy, the place and the people so like home!

Then the leisurely walk across the fields to Wattisbridge! the short, smooth grass on which the ladies' cool muslin dresses made a rustle as of the light wings of birds, the delicious country air, the pleasant country sights, the dancing of the squirrels in the wood, the loveliness of the wild flowers in the hedges, the blue sky, the green earth, and the calm stillness of the Christian Sabbath pervading all things, and underlying, like a soft key-note, the whole music of animated nature!

And what if the pleasure were sensational? Happy is the man, I think, who can take a sinless joy out of his senses! to whom Nature does not exhibit her landscapes, chant her melodies, unveil her loveliness, all in vain! whom the lights and sounds and flowers of the summer thrill with a strange delight, and who can thank God for living and moving and having his being with the unquestioning simplicity of a child!

George Geith never felt so thankful about having resigned his profession as when he came out of church with Beryl Molozane. Whilst he was a curate, living within a sacred pale, fenced off to a certain extent from free contact with the laity, he never heard how the laity pull their clerical guides to pieces. With a sudden check and horror it came upon him that perhaps in his day he had been derided and scoffed at too — his manner mimicked, his tone ridiculed, his mistakes pounced on, his sermons criticized. It was not

healthy, he felt, for the congregation to be setting itself up in judgment; and yet, if the teachers were like the Wattisbridge clergy — muffs — what then?

He could not contradict the truth of what the Molozanes said about rectors and curates alike; but, at the same time, it was not pleasant for a man who had been a clergyman to feel, that instead of himself and his brothers being as he once fondly imagined, teachers, they were rather set up as targets at which all the small witticisms, all the trifling jests of their hearers might be directed.

And had he dared to remind Beryl of the message these Wattisbridge curates brought, he knew she would at once have answered that it was at the messengers, not the message, she was laughing. But he did not dare. George, who in most respects had not been wont to feel cowardly, was now so anxious to keep on good terms with his host's family, that he often held his tongue when he knew he ought to have opened his lips, and when, but for some strange feeling which held him back, he would have liked to speak to her about this mockery of all things (except Mr. Wern) holy and pure, which offended him.

For though he had thrown aside the gown, all *esprit de corps* had not departed also, and he often felt inclined to stand up and do battle for these men, against whom Dick Elsenham and Beryl Molozane were perpetually bending their bows and twanging their arrows.

Capping verses was nothing in comparison to the way this pair amused themselves, capping the peculiarities of the preacher. From the great family pew, which Mr. Molozane had not relinquished with the Park, the two took mental notes which they compared when they came out of church; and George had heard Beryl robed in a black silk cloak, with a red shawl hung on behind, delivering a sermon *à la* Wattisbridge to perfection. He knew when he was listening to her he ought to have gone out of the room, or offered some serious remonstrance, but he had only joined in Dick's

laughter, and encouraged Beryl to further literary efforts; not a thing escaped her, not a movement, not a look, and to people who were inclined to laugh, Wattisbridge Church offered temptations innumerable.

Often George caught himself thinking, "If I were there, how differently I would have the service performed;" and then he felt devoutly thankful he was not there, and that he never should have to preach again. For had his life depended on it, he knew he could not, after hearing Beryl's comments, be ever able to lift his mind above them, and he began to perceive how fine a thing it is for clergymen, that, though they sometimes bear fault-finding, they never bear ridicule.

What made Mr. Geith more indignant against Beryl, if indignant be not far too strong a word, was, that he knew perfectly well if Mr. Wern were of the party, her tone would have been very different.

As it was, she chattered on — mocking, grimacing, ridiculing — till one might have thought life a puppet-show, containing no definite aim in time, no hope for eternity.

George did not like it. He would have been better content to see Beryl down almost in the depths of despair, than to notice that nothing in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, seemed able to make any serious impression upon her. Could she be sorry for long? Could she grieve sincerely? Would it be possible for her to weep without the sunshine breaking through? Was there any earnestness about her? Had she really a heart? In very truth, did she possess a soul? Had women souls at all? he caught himself wondering, when Beryl woke him out of his brown study with —

"Well, Mr. Geith, what treason are you plotting now?"

"I was wondering whether it would be possible for any man to preach a sermon at which you would not care to laugh."

"I think it would — will you try? We shall have plenty

of leisure this afternoon, and we will listen to you as long as you like to talk. You shall take for your text, 'Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh,' if you choose, and none of us will be offended."

"And then you will make fun of me to your heart's content."

"Oh! fie, Mr. Geith; do I make fun of my friends? Can I see anything in them of which to make fun? I suppose you are beginning to think, with Granny, that I can be serious about nothing — that I can feel no trouble — carry no burden."

"If I did think so, should I be wrong, Miss Beryl?" he inquired.

"*Et tu Brute!*" was all the answer he could get out of her; but the brown eyes proved more eloquent than her tongue, and looked reproaches at him — such reproaches, that George felt himself constrained to say, —

"The truth is, I have never seen you grave but once, until yesterday; and yesterday" —

"You thought I was not grave in earnest," she quickly added, as he paused; "and there you were wrong. You imagine, because it is necessary to my existence to laugh at people's oddities, that I never feel for their woes. You think, because I have a quick sense of the ludicrous, that I have no eyes for grief. And then you do me an injustice. You often are unjust to me, Mr. Geith."

"Am I?" he said; "tell me how, and I will strive to think all you wish for the future."

"Why, you have got that stupid notion which so many people take up, that the same person can't be sorry and merry. You fancy that, because I think the poor funny, I do not also think they are often in great distress. They may be humbugs — many of them are — and I see they are humbugs; but I know, at the same time, that, no matter what they may be, they feel heat, and cold, and the want of blankets, and the dearness of coals, and their inability to get

such, just as much as you or I. For this reason I do my best to get them helped; but I reserve to myself the privilege of laughing, just to prove I am not imposed on; that I see only their necessities as they are, and not their necessities as they present them for public inspection. Hunger and thirst, Mr. Geith, and the want of fire and clothing, are realities, concerning which I suppose even I may speak gravely if I please."

"Assuredly," answered her companion; "but there are other people besides the poor at whom you laugh; about whom you never speak a grave sentence."

"You are thinking of the unhappy Mr. Grey," she said, laughing. "I must make fun of Mr. Grey, and his refined sugar air; he is so terribly proper; so intensely decorous — one sentence lasts him as long as half a dozen would any body else; one opinion becomes in his hands a volume, sufficient for a whole day's slow conversation."

"But I believe he is an excellent young man," said Mr. Geith, rebukingly.

"Did you ever know any one who was a frightful bore who could do nothing at a party but sit like a pope on a hard chair, that was not an excellent young man? I never did, and I have had a large experience of curates: besides what do I say against Mr. Grey? nothing, except that if he stopped with his text his sermons would be long enough; and that we are not to stare, because his 'mamma,' as he calls her, said he was shy, and that it was not good for him. All that does not prevent my thinking there is something very touching in the way his mother listens to him preaching; and I would not for any consideration let her hear me laughing at him; or say to her that I do not think him a second St. Paul. Indeed, it is quite true that I never look at Mr. Grey without thinking, 'He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.'"

This was the way Beryl spoiled every sentence she uttered. She never could sketch a grave face without putting a mock



behind it. Whether from habit or from some mental condition, it seemed impossible for her to disassociate even the most earnest things from the grotesque. The most serious subject had its laughable side; over graves the clown danced; behind trees there was an impromptu dancing.

There seemed nothing earnest in her, save that which is the common heritage of true-hearted women — love. She would not make fun of those she loved. Was that the reason she was grave with Mr. Wern?

George marvelled about that, and thought he would beat the cover, too.

"How does it happen," he asked, smiling, "that you never make fun at these things and people when you are with Mr. Wern?"

"How do you know I do not?" she quickly retorted.

"Because your cousin told me so," he answered.

"I sha'n't tell you — I can't tell you," she almost cried; then, calming down in a moment, she went on: "Mr. Wern is different from most people. There is a gravity about him which infects even me: he is so earnest himself; he makes life such a frightfully solemn affair that he makes me miserable in spite of myself. He compels me to feel good while I am with him. I am not laughing at Mr. Geith. I am only telling you the honest, sober truth."

And her face changed so while she was speaking that George could not doubt her word; could not think for a moment she was deluding herself, and misleading him; only wondered more and more as to what it was Beryl really meant, as to what she really meant.

Two minutes after no one would have thought she meant anything; jesting with Mr. Elsenham; laughing at her. Who could have told what with her was real — what she meant?

Which was the actual nature? that which skimmed through

existence on the wings of mirth, or that which looked  
for an instant through tears?

Who may judge? Which of us, friends, may even  
at the true part of our neighbor's nature, when we are  
competent to lay our finger on the sterling metal in  
our own?

## CHAPTER XXII.

## ACROSS THE FIELDS.

THERE was no evening service at Wattisbridge, and as it did not suit the Molozanes to attend church in the afternoon, the three young ladies, their cousin, and Mr. Geith, walked over in the evening to Withefell Bottom, a little hamlet lying two miles on the other side of Withefell proper, where the vicar held forth on the saving nature of faith, and buried works out of sight, under a mausoleum of his own erection.

Beryl was kind enough to give an epitome of the probable sermon to the quartet after dinner ; and Mr. Geith, who had in church-days been a little "high," forbore to blame her, even in his heart, for her mimicry. Rather he enjoyed the ridicule ; for Mr. Elsenham informed him, privately, that the vicar was a pet of the Withefell saint ; and that not only the Withefell saint, but the proprietor of Withefell Hall, affected the teaching of the clergyman who preached faith without works.

"Filthy rags of our own self-righteousness," said Beryl. "I always fancy bits of red cotton floating from gooseberry trees when I hear that ; but perhaps Mr. Geith may like the vicar. He is greatly run after by people who really think all they can do means mites in the treasury ; and also by those who would like to go to heaven without working at all : *vide* Mr. Finch. Eh, Dick."

"Mr. Finch be hanged !" said Mr. Elsenham in answer.

"You would have said something else if Mr. Geith had not been here," opined Louise.

"It is all the same to me where he is," remarked her cousin.

"I were the architect of my own fortunes, I were," said Beryl, coming down from her pulpit in a minute. "I never owed no man nothing in the way of gratitude. I was n't like you, Mr. Elsenham: you was brought up in the lap of luxury; you had but to ring for this and t'other, and say, 'John, bring me this; John, fetch me that.' With me it were, 'Ned, you young beggar, where are you skulking?' or, 'Ned, you lazy scoundrel, look sharp.' You loll in carriages, young man. You never rode in a wan, I'll be bound. I were glad, I were, to get a post as dog in a wan; I liked that better than ever I did since I made my fortune, riding in a carriage like a swell. Well, well, the ups and downs is wonderful; my old master's sons, the one is a counter-hopper, and the other a private in the 53d. He went to the dogs, he did, and here am I, Edward Finch, Esquire, J. P., and owner of Withefell Hall. Life's strange, ain't it, Miss Beryl?"

"I wish you would not, Beryl," said Miss Molozane; and then Mr. Geith knew in a minute that Mr. Finch was the individual who had aspired to Miss Molozane's hand, and whom Beryl had said she should prefer to Dick Elsenham.

And would Beryl have done so? George asked himself. Would not the polish, slight though it might be, have been better to the girl than the frightful vulgarity of the other's address? With Mr. Finch he felt inclined to shout out, "Life's strange, ain't it?" and to wonder what there was in it real and true.

"Do you remember, Beryl, the Sunday you and I were turned out of Withefell Church?" asked Dick, with a malicious twinkle in his black eyes.

"Yes; and I remember with satisfaction the handful of hair I pulled out of your head before we were," retorted Beryl, viciously.

"What had you been doing?" asked Mr. Geith.

"It was one Sunday, when we were little children," answered Beryl; "and as we were both horribly tired of being

at the Park doing nothing, we stole out, and trotted off to Withell Church, across the fields. Nobody there knew who we were, and when Dick and I got fighting over which should have the hymn-book, we were taken out; but not before we had made a frightful noise with rolling off the seat. I was carried out, I believe, and carried home. One thing I do recollect, that I scratched Dick's face; and I sometimes wish I was young enough to scratch it again." And Beryl pulled a grimace at her cousin.

"You may make the most of your time," he said, "for you won't dare do that when Granny comes."

"I wish both you and your Granny were in the bottom of the sea," remarked Beryl; "why don't you keep her in London? we don't want her here."

"I am sure I don't," he answered; "tell me some way of preventing her, and I will."

"Tell her we have small-pox — fever — cholera — what you choose. Like all good people, she is afraid of death. You will be so pleased with Granny, Mr. Geith; she is such a nice old lady, so much like her grandson."

"I'll declare she is not in the least like me," interrupted Mr. Elsenham.

"That is a pity, is it not, Mr. Geith? I have not one of her letters at hand, but I think I can repeat one of her epistles."

"Do you wish me to leave the room?" asked Miss Molone.

"I am quite indifferent," answered Beryl, as she took up a piece of paper lying on the table, and began, after clearing her throat:—

"MY DEAR NIECE, — It seems to me a long time since I heard from you, but I trust your silence does not proceed from any other cause than that of having been more agreeably occupied than in writing to an old woman. I shall trust hear you, your dear papa, Beryl, and Louise are well.

"I hope to see you, *if perfectly convenient* (D. V.) on Monday next. Thankful as I am and ought to be to the Lord for his unspeakable mercies, I still feel I am getting old, and that an occasional change and intercourse with young people is desirable. Will you therefore write *by return*, saying whether you can receive me, Mr. Elsenham, Gibbs, and Tibbs. The remainder of the servants can remain *as usual* at the 'Stag.'

"With kind remembrance to your father, Beryl, and Louise, with love for yourself,—

"Your affectionate grandmother,

"M. L. ELSENHAM."

"L stands for Lucretia," exclaimed Beryl, as she paused; "and I ought, perhaps, further to state that"—

"Can't you let her alone while she is in London?" interrupted Mr. Elsenham; "and go and put on your bonnet and let us get off to church."

"You are so fond of church, Dick."

"I'd like it better if there were any pretty girls in the parish," retorted her cousin. Whereupon Miss Molozane rebuked them both; Mr. Elsenham for making the remark, and Beryl for provoking it. "The house is really like a bear-garden, with the two of you in it," observed the beauty.

"What is a bear-garden, Tilly?" asked Louise, gravely; but Miss Molozane declined giving any explanation, rather preferring to follow her cousin's advice, and prepare for their walk.

It was pleasant going to church across the fields in the evening, but George did not much care for the path as they came back. For one thing, the days were beginning to draw in; and for another, the sky was cloudy and dull, seeming to threaten rain.

Altogether, there was a gloom over the landscape which depressed him; and the company of Messrs. Finch and Wern, who were so good as to walk back most of the way

with the Dower House party, did not tend to raise his spirits. At every step he seemed to her the chink of gold; every sentence reminded him that these men had made their money whilst he was still struggling. Houses, lands, wealth, position, he reflected, lay waiting for the acceptance of Mr. Molozane's daughters.

Bitterly he remembered that these people would be walking across the green Hertfordshire fields, and talking to the girls who had taught him what a happy home was like, in the (to him) dreary days to come, when he had done his work, and spoken his farewells, and returned to the old drudgery again.

He had no right to repine, certainly: he had been happy, he had enjoyed himself, his health was reëstablished, he had gained strength and fresh vigor through breathing the pure country air. Why, then, should he grieve? and George caught at the leaves of the trees, and plucked them off ruthlessly as he asked himself this question.

Why should he grieve? Ah, friends and fellow-travelers! how often are we asked this question? how often do we put it ourselves, and how seldom can we return any satisfactory answer to it? We have had our cake, we have eaten it. There has been no bitter in it; to the last crumb we have found it sweet. Why grieve, then? for we cannot eat and have.

But who does it grieve, who does it sorrow, for that passing away which is, after all, the real misery of life? Friends, youth, beauty, fame, happiness, homes, where the sun is streaming on us, moments when in the moonlight we look at faces which we love, days which are full of such happiness that they seem scarcely to have been spent on earth; all these are trials to feel; they are but part of a procession which is ever moving from us, ever passing away. Why should we grieve? Good heavens! how could we do otherwise, when we know so well that after the sunshine comes gloom,— after the day, night? Is it marvellous that, feeling

the darkness creeping on, we should linger to the last in the light? that, feeling the waves of the cruel ocean we have breasted licking our feet, we should stretch out our hands after the groups that are walking away over the pleasant sands we shall never tread more?

Life's days are so gloomy when the summer is gone, its streets are so deserted when the gallant cavalcade is past, its ways are so stony when we have to tread them alone, that it is no wonder we grieve. When the hour comes for parting, and the sad good-byes are spoken, no wonder, even though we have had all our right, our holiday, our cake, our milk.

George Geith had had his holiday, his happy sunshine days of leisure; but behold! the holidays were well-nigh spent, and he was going back to resume his old low place in the school of life.

He was in low spirits; he was dull; he was cross, if you will; and Beryl's cheerfulness vexed him, even though that cheerfulness was evinced in disagreeing with Mr. Wern, and laughing at his opinions.

For once before the Withefell saint Beryl was not demure; and when she was running most counter to all his ideas, she would look over to Mr. Geith for approval, which, as she was annoying Mr. Wern for the sake of pleasing Mr. Geith, I think she deserved.

But George would not be appeased — not even when she got upon the question of the millennium, concerning the time of which Beryl expressed her belief that the Withefell vicar must have recently had some secret information from above.

"Because, how otherwise," said the young lady, "could he know for certain that it would be three years hence exactly?"

"I must say his arguments were very convincing," here put in Mr. Finch.

"You don't mean though, I suppose, that you believe there will be an end of all things at the end of three years?" said Beryl.



"I believe we are living in remarkable times," answered Mr. Finch, who pronounced the word as if it were "remarkable"; "and that we cannot tell the day nor the hour, and that therefore, as Mr. Wilton says, we ought to put our houses in order."

"But Mr. Wilton says we do know the day and hour," interposed Louise, "for he declared that, reading the signs of the times, the end of the world would come at the expiration of three years exactly."

"For which reason," added Beryl, a little flippantly, "if it were not for death, which really may come at any minute, we need n't be in such a hurry about our houses till nearer the time."

"Do you know," said Mr. Wern, "it appears to me the service has not benefited us much."

"I am sure it has not benefited me," answered Miss Molozane; "for I was bored to death, and I have got a chill from the damp of the church. Mr. Finch, you really ought to build a new one; it is enough to kill any one sitting in it for a couple of hours."

"It lies in such a hollow," explained Mr. Wern.

"There are plenty of nice sites in the neighborhood," observed Beryl.

"How does it happen you don't express no opinions about the sermon, sir," asked Mr. Finch, turning benignly towards George.

"I am one of those happy individuals who have no opinions," replied the accountant.

"Oh! Mr. Geith, when you know you are a long way towards Rome," said Miss Molozane; while Louise followed with —

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Wern; he goes far beyond the Wat-  
tisbridge people. He does not think the service there is performed properly at all."

"He wants a procession of priests, crosses, and candles; and he would feel happier if he could go to confession," added Beryl.

"Miss Beryl, as usual, is sacrificing her acquaintances to her love of amusement," answered Mr. Geith; whilst Mr. Wern turned towards him with a curious expression in his face—an expression, the meaning of which George did not understand till long afterwards.

"But about the church," said Beryl, coming back to the point from which Mr. Finch had diverged. "Won't you build one? pray do. It would involve ever so much gayety, and we want some excitement. Let me see: there would be the stone-laying, and the opening, and we might have a few bazaars; and then whoever was married in it first ought to invite everybody in the parish to the wedding."

"I suppose you would like a dance on the green at the consecration of the grave-yard," said Dick Elsenham.

"I should like a dance anywhere, under any circumstances," returned Beryl. "It is nearly as long a thing as I can remember, being at a party. Mr. Finch, I really think I should be better pleased if you were to give a ball than if you were to build a church."

"Now it's curious, a'n't it," remarked Mr. Finch to the company generally, "that I was just a-thinking of giving a hop."

"How enchanting!" exclaimed Beryl. "Do tell us all about it. Won't you have the dancing in the picture-gallery, and"—

"I believe, Miss Molozane, I must say good evening," here interposed Mr. Wern; and shaking hands with all the party, he turned off across Molozane Park to his own residence.

Heaven knows what thoughts he carried with him by the way; but, judging from the look wherewith he regarded Beryl at parting, they could not have been pleasant.

"There is a mark against your name, old fellow," said Mr. Elsenham to Mr. Geith, looking after the retreating figure. "Wern will set you down as a Jesuit, and gravelly remonstrate with my uncle on the danger of having you in the house."

"He is welcome," answered George. "I shall not be long in it now, at any rate;" and the pair walked on in silence, listening to Beryl teasing Mr. Finch to death about the ball, insisting he should fix a time, and earnestly entreating him to come to the Dower House and talk over the preliminaries.

"Grandmamma will be with us to-morrow," said Beryl, demurely. "She will be so glad to see you."

"Thank you. I shall be very pleased to call on Mrs. Elsenham; very so, indeed; and if these gentlemen will come up and eat their mutton with me on Tuesday — dine in a plain way — I shall be better pleased still. I am very sorry, sir, not to have made your acquaintance earlier," he added, turning to George; "I should like to have a chat with you about the city. I'm from the city myself, sir, and I'm not ashamed to say so to nobody."

To which speech what answer could Mr. Geith make, but that he saw no occasion for anything but pride in the recollection?

"And you'll come too, won't you," continued Mr. Finch, turning towards Mr. Elsenham, which Dick assured him he would, stating for a reason after they parted from the owner of Withefell Hall, "that his wine was tip-top, although his grammar was the devil."

"Shall I tell you what your mutton will be, Mr. Geith?" asked Beryl. "Fish and mock turtle; ducks and green peas; lamb and mint sauce; entrées innumerable; puddings by the score; every vegetable you can mention; every fruit you can imagine. And his sister — oh! I must show you Miss Finch when we get home. And in the way of wines, he will give you what he calls 'clarick' and mussel; and white and red; and heavy and light; and he will tell you that he himself does not care for anything but port; that there was a time when he knew more about gin and Old Tom than any genteel swallow; and that he a'n't sure but a good glass of Hollands still beats Mounseer and Cavalero into fits."

"I do not intend, however, Miss Beryl, to drink Mr. Finch's wine, and make free of him afterwards," remarked Mr. Geith, a little ill-humoredly.

"Don't, then," said Beryl; "but, as I do not care for either hock or claret, I shall make fun of him if I please. It's a good soul, though. I like Mr. Finch. He is a great favorite of mine."

"Heaven preserve me, then, from that distinction," murmured George, devoutly.

"But he is not one of my friends," she said in a lower tone — a tone which came back to him often when the future became the present. "You have disapproved of my being grave, Mr. Geith; were you graciously pleased to approve of me this evening?"

"It is not for me to express an opinion," he replied.

"But it is, if you form one," she answered. "I am vexed now that I annoyed Mr. Wern. He is better than anybody else I know; but I was in a teasing mood, and I thought you did not care for me to be in earnest; and so I have fallen between two stools, as most people do when they try to please their neighbors."

"I hope you have not hurt yourself much," said her companion; and though Beryl could not help laughing, the tears came into her eyes whilst she laughed. Pity it was getting so dark that George could not see them!

But without seeing them, he began that night taking himself to task. Sitting by the open window, inhaling the perfumes that came floating to him from the garden. Alone, in the stillness, he commenced that personal cross-examination in which so few have the courage to persevere.

What did all this grief mean? What was this tearing at his heart? Why was he afraid to look forward? Why had he been so unutterably happy with these girls? He had never admired Beryl; he knew he did not now care for Matilda; whilst, as for Louey! Setting Matilda and Louey out of the question, however, thinking of a woman not as of

a picture, but as a friend and companion, was it not Beryl he sorrowed to leave? — Beryl, who now occupied a shrine in his heart which had never been filled before by woman? For, though he had admired many; though he had all his life been a worshipper of beauty; though he had acknowledged many queens, fluttered around many a flame, he had never before felt anything like this — this which was eating into his soul, making existence insupportable, the future intolerable without her.

Through the long hours he sat thinking of this new gospel, which he had feared was an old one with him, pondering over the mystery of this strange sensation which had stolen upon him so gently, so tranquilly, that it had become a part of himself before he dreamed of danger.

And now, when he saw the danger, what then? Did he resolve to win and to wear: did he ever, even in fancy, see Beryl his wife — hear her call him husband?

Never once; for there are some pains which bring with them partial numbness; and this agony of hopeless love, of love which could but love and leave, left him no strength for aught save the thought that he must go away; that at all hazards he must break the spell; and depart carrying his wound with him.

He had never been able to realize Beryl married, even in his jealousy; even when he imagined she was lending a too favorable ear to Mr. Wern; he had never pictured her mistress of the Park; and now, when he came to understand that without her his life would be lonely forever, he still could not fancy this girl a wife; her delusive picture of domestic happiness arose out of the darkness to mock him with false hopes.

And, supposing the choice to have been presented to him, of living on in his present paradise, or of taking his Eve out of it into the wide world beyond, I think George Geith would have chosen the former without an instant's hesitation. Fenced round by the hedges of Dower House; wandering

amongst the roses in its old-fashioned garden ; standing in the twilight on the terrace ; he had felt secure both from sorrow and sin. The past lay outside, the future was forgotten. His long servitude, his seven years of work, his nights of toil, his days of anxiety, were all left behind when once the dear old house was reached, when once kindly voices greeted him, and soft hands touched his in welcome.

There was no need to think of money, no necessity for planning about ways and means ; and to many a man it takes the gloss off love to have to be thinking about pounds, shillings, and pence ; about sirloins of beef and legs of mutton, and little account of the bakers, which he foresees the blessing of a wife will entail upon him. Love-making is a pleasanter occupation than calculating "how much a year." Somehow, computing the expense of a woman's keep destroys the idea of her divinity. The business view of matrimony is not a pleasant one ; but that romantic affection which is the full enjoyment of to-day, forgets that there must come a to-morrow, is a foretaste of heaven in which to-day is forever, and to-morrow and the end never.

It is a mistake, I think, to imagine that a man's thoughts rush off straight from love to marriage, from ideality to reality. On the contrary, it appears to me natural that most men should ignore the mainland, with its labor, its care, its responsibility, so long as they can float over the ocean of love without trouble, without fear.

Moreover, if the acme of misery be the inability to hope, the acme of happiness is surely the absence of any wish to hope, of anything to wish for, save this, that the present might go on forever without change.

And this was the state of beatitude in which George Geith had been living, and from which he awakened with a start to tell himself he must go. For what was he to Beryl, and what could Beryl Molozane be to him, save a memory and a regret ? In the dull, dull days to come, when the snow was on the ground, when the frost was lying on the graves in

Fen Court, when the black trees were dripping with blacker rain, and the pavements were sloppy, and the city wretched, he should still in recollection see Beryl standing among the roses, still hear her laugh ringing out happy and mirthful as of yore. To him she would never grow old; to him there would be no awful hereafter of gray hair, of wrinkles, of old youngness, of sickness, feebleness, loss of youth. She would be his young love to him forever; his to the day of his death, the laughing, singing, gleeful Beryl, of sweet seventeen. Other men might see their brides change to matrons, but for him there would be no change. She would be in his memory just the same, forever and forever.

Shall I go on telling how through the night he sat hugging his misery to him; indulging in melancholy, and finding sweetness in the cup, as though he were still a boy, and young enough to find imaginary luxury in a draught he had never tasted?

Shall I repeat the old, old story, of his first love? First, though it come as the finish to fifty fancies, hath still power to strike off the iron bands of time, and leave the soul free from the incubus of the years that have aged and worn the body. Would it not weary the reader to tell of the mist of tears through which this strong man beheld his ship going down among the breakers; to describe how, with head bent forward and arms folded on the window-sill, he made his discovery, and decided on his future course, whilst the gloom deepened and darkened, and wrapped him lovingly and gently in the clouds of night?

He was unmanned, and it was well that there were none who could see his face, for of all the troubles he had met and surmounted no trouble had ever come nigh unto him like this.

And yet, if he could have retraced his steps, would he? Ah! who that has loved would choose his ways to have been different? Who, after eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, would go back into Eden and leave the fruit untasted?

Amongst thorns and brambles his very future will lie, for his sake the ground may be cursed, and the yield her increase only in sorrow and with pain.

All this matters not, for his eyes have been opened it is something, even when wandering through all darkest places, for him to remember that he has once a glimpse of heaven !



## CHAPTER XXIII.

## A LITTLE SURPRISE.

How many good resolutions which night hears made, does morning see broken? does not wear a different aspect countide from that which it did at midnight? What was decided on in the darkness do we not modify in the light? Are we the same men and the same women, I marvel, as the clock chimes the early morning hours, as we were when we were striking in the starlight stillness? Or are we like the lady of the fairy tale, who was a true wife one half of the time and a wandering wolf the other?

If night's good resolves could be carried into action after sunrise on the morrow, what a perfect world we should live in!

If sluggards could but rise at the first call; if the weak could be but as strong; if the strong could be but as forgiving when day breaks as they meant to be a few hours before, would not our neighbors be almost too good? would not our own virtues dazzle our eyes? If ever the time comes when that is done in the morning which was decided over night, there will be no more stories to write of weakness, sorrow, repentance, remorse. The world will be peopled with saints, and our book-shelves will be full of the stories thereof!

But as matters stand at present, the pie-crusts on which we expend so much labor in solitude are broken so soon as we come face to face with the world and its temptations. It is so with George Geith at any rate. The Beryl thought that in the midst of night's solemnity was a different being to

the Beryl he met glancing amongst the flowers. She was something in the one case to part from, to beware of as a snare and a sorrow ; whilst in the other she was a girl to see as much of as possible ; to be near, to talk to, to laugh with, as long as circumstances would permit.

The night had bid him depart ; the sunshine begged him to stay. The still voice of the darkness had said, " Go ; for each hour will but increase the misery of the inevitable parting ; " but the summer wind murmured pleasanter words, as it fanned his cheek caressingly, and whispered, " Be happy whilst you may ; your stay can do no harm to anybody but yourself."

What man would not have hearkened to the latter voice and still basked on in the sunshine, more particularly when it seemed as if that morning, beyond all other mornings, Beryl had laid herself out to be agreeable and winning. She had her dogs with her on the lawn, where the poodle marched about gravely on his hind legs, and Royal offered first his right and then his left paw to George, with a sublime gravity which was irresistibly ludicrous.

From the lawn they walked up the elm avenue, and as they walked Beryl spoke of her father and sisters with a pretty gravity which was amazingly becoming to her.

Had not Mr. Geith noticed how ill papa was looking? Could he, would he, tell her how affairs were likely to turn out? Should they be able to keep the Park? To which latter question George made answer that he could not exactly tell her yet ; but he inquired, " if it were to be sold would Mr. Elsenham not purchase it, and so keep the property in the family ? "

" He could not," Beryl replied ; " he has not sixpence in the world of his own. Granny wanted to buy it, but papa would not sell. She then wished to rent it, but he preferred letting it to Mr. Wern."

" Would Mrs. Elsenham not purchase it for her grandson?" George inquired.

O; and if she would, I am sure papa could never bear Dick master of the Park."

Does he not like him?" asked her companion.

Have you lived all this time with us, and not found that she retorted. "Papa likes Dick almost as well as

but, seriously, you appear to me excellent friends."

Do we?" she said; "that shows how much appearances mislead."

Do you mean then that you really are not friends? At what you said about Mr. Elsenham, I expected to find an intolerable puppy. I confess I have been agreeably disappointed in him, and" —

And you think Tilly has chosen wisely," she added. Well, Mr. Geith, if that be your opinion, it is not mine.

I do not know Dick; you have never seen him yet in a light. I would not be in Dick's power, I would not be the mercy of his generosity for any earthly consideration. I would rather be indebted to Granny, and that is saying all I can say."

If Mr. Molozane dislikes him, why does he permit the marriage to go on?"

Now, Mr. Geith, do you think he could stop it if Granny and Tilly have set their hearts on it taking place? Besides, Tilly likes him — and she does, I suppose — is not that all you need care for? Sometimes I can't hold my tongue about it to her, but afterwards I could bite it out for my pains." "I should like to know why you dislike him so much, and yet you appear to get on so well together."

It is very likely you have your desire gratified if you go to call on him to the Hall to-morrow evening," she said, significantly, coloring a little as she spoke. "You have seen Dick in a very best, I assure you; and as for our getting on well, we have never yet met with anybody I could not talk to except Louey; and even Louey is afraid of her. Louey will take up her pen writing as if she were earning ten thousand a year when Mrs. Elsenham comes."

“Do you think your sister would show me any of her writing?” he asked.

“To be sure she would, and be pleased at anybody taking an interest about the matter. I was looking at some of her things the other day, and I really do think they are very strange and wonderful, if I could understand them; but then I never was in the least clever. Now, I think Tilly, who has might read Louey’s poems to please her.”

“Does Mr. Molozane not read them?”

“I think I told you we had lost one sister,” she said; and the explanation was satisfactory. “I will ask Louey for some of her poems.” And straight away darted Beryl, followed at full flight by the dogs, who went growling and rubbing over each other as they sped after her.

I am afraid George anathematized the manuscripts. It is very nice to be literary, and to talk on intellectual subjects may be very interesting and improving to those who care about intellect; but a walk, for all that, in the clear bright air of a summer morning, with a pretty, lively girl for a companion — a girl, moreover, with whom one is secretly in love — is nicer and more interesting still.

“Hang the poems!” thought the accountant, as he retraced his steps towards the house; and who may blame him?

“She is busy now,” said Beryl, when she returned; “but she will look you some out after breakfast. She was so pleased about you wanting to see them, Mr. Geith! Somehow, I do not think we are right about Louey. It cannot be good for anybody to live a life apart, as she does; can it?”

“I think, if she were my sister, I should try to understand her a little,” answered George.

“I wish I could; I wish I was clever!” sighed Beryl. “Now, if she would write prose, I should be able to read her things; but poetry — oh, if you could but imagine how it wearies me! If you do think her rhymes foolish

“Geith, I am sure I need not ask you not to tell her so. She is hardly more than a child yet, though she does scribble on constantly.”

And the tears sprang into Beryl's eyes as she spoke, though from what secret well they gushed George could not divine. He only knew that this quick sensitiveness, this fickle nature, which was forever changing, when there was sunshine one moment and shade the next, was one of Beryl's latest charms.

He was beginning to understand how slight a line divides melancholy from merriment; how quickly tears may dim eyes that have been a moment before dancing with merriment.

He was commencing to learn wherein this girl's power of action lay, viz., in a mental constitution which had the keenest sense of the ridiculous, combined with the deepest sympathy for suffering; which, while it could see something ludicrous in the most ordinary — nay, and it might be, in the best circumstances of every-day life — had yet every cord tuned to echo the slightest breath of trouble, the faintest note of woe. If the finest wit be near akin to the deepest sorrow, so the extremest gaiety is next-door neighbor to the truest sorrow; and those people who in themselves combine the two opposites of light-heartedness and sadness, charm us as the Irish melodies charm us, we scarcely know till we learn the secret of their peculiarity, which is, that plaintive minors are ever mingling with joyous majors; that wherever a ringing octave comes, we may be sure a melancholy seventh will succeed thereto.

Thinking of this, thinking of what strange creatures women are, and of how much stranger some women are than others, George got fairly addled after breakfast among his accounts, for once he was not sorry to see Louise entering the room, and Louise, moreover, without her cap.

He was so astonished at the change in her appearance, that for a minute he could not take his eyes off her.

“Do you not think it an improvement,” said the young

lady, who, like Beryl, was not very easily disconcerted; though, like Beryl, she blushed a little as she spoke.

"I should think I do," he answered. "What can have induced you to disfigure yourself for so long a time?"

"My hair is only just growing again," she laughed, touching her short silky locks; "but I thought I should like to put on my best looks for Granny. Here are my manuscripts, Mr. Geith. Beryl said you would take the trouble of reading them;" and she straightway laid down the papers, and walking across the room, took up her old position on the library steps.

"Are you going to read them?" she asked, surveying him calmly from her vantage-ground.

"What! now?" he said.

"Certainly, now, this minute. I want to see what you think of them. I shall know better from your face than from any words you may speak."

It was a pleasant announcement certainly; but still George did not shrink from the task. He had voluntarily undertaken it; and if the manuscripts had to be read, and read moreover in the presence of the author, why, they should be read, that was all!

Besides, he really was curious to see what Louise could find to say about things in general, and men and women in particular; and, accordingly, he opened the first folio which came to his hand, and which proved to be a tragedy in five acts, written out — as the productions of young authors always are written out — so legibly, with such loving neatness, that a printer might weep regretful tears over them.

For a while George read on steadily, then he began to lift his eyes from the page and look towards the author doubtfully. Meantime she sat perfectly still on the top of the steps, with her elbows resting on her knees, and her chin supported with both hands, staring at him with the most absorbed air of contemplation imaginable.

She would have been a proud girl at that minute, could

have known exactly what was passing through his mind. It had suddenly dawned upon him, what some creatures their teens can write before they die!

There was not much in the story, perhaps, and containing nothing original in its treatment.

A father wrongfully executed; a son vowing himself to vengeance; a woman faithful in love, yet strong in duty; the scene laid in the remotest Saxon ages; there was, certainly, nothing in all this to interest a man like George Geith, and yet he was interested in the authoress and astonished at her talent.

He was sufficient of a critic to be able to sift out the corn from the chaff; and as he came upon such a passage as this,—

“Revenge!

It is the fire which passion strikes from vice.”

could not help marvelling where, in the name of wonder, the girl had gathered her ideas from.

On and still on he read,—

“Go to; I feel not love: ’twas made for fools,  
And is a worthless boon.”

“It was *my* all; I gave it *thee*.”

[I am copying from the original manuscript, and I pause here to ask, what George Geith asked himself, where do these thoughts come from? How can people whom the path of passion has never touched, whom the flames of love have never scorched, imagine these things? how, when they have never imagined them, can they put them into words? The genius of youth must, I think, be inspiration. It is easy to conceive how those who have passed through the furnace can tell of its heat; but it is as impossible to imagine how those who have never been tried in the fires of love, hate, or vengeance, can write of their intensity, as to think how some who have never trodden the shores of a foreign land can describe its scenery.

Meantime George still read on, read conscientiously, till

he came to the last page; then he turned over the cover, and looked at Louise.

"Well, Mr. Geith" — He could see that the face of the Molozane Solomon was very pale as she said this interrogatively.

"I am astonished, Miss Louise. I did not think you could have done it. I do not know where you can have got it."

And opening the manuscript again, he looked once more over this:

"Thou knowest not my nature:  
The babbling brook, that ever pines and frets,  
A breeze will still; but the wide boundless ocean  
Smiles at the feeble breeze, and can be tost  
By Heaven's whirlwinds only: so my soul  
Looked on life's troubles with a placid eye,  
And bore them meekly, as what all endured  
And the gods ordered; but the loftier storm  
Hath roused its slow awakened energies,  
And stern and steady are they."

"You think I can write, then?" She was by this time standing beside him.

"I am certain you can."

"And shall I make money?"

"That is a different matter; you may perhaps hereafter."

"Hereafter! when?"

"Fifteen, twenty years, perhaps," he said.

"When papa is dead; when the Park is gone; when I shall care for nothing; when it will not signify what comes or what goes;" and she fell on her knees beside the table and rained such tears over her papers as George had never previously seen fall from a woman's eyes. Did he need to ask then where she got part of her inspiration? Was he coming to understand at last that the life's book of the youngest may hold within its pages something of which the philosophy of the oldest dreams not?

Had this been the vision of the child beside him? Had she been thinking to redeem the past, to gild the future



Had she fallen into the usual error of imagining an ink-bottle would prove a gold mine, and quires of foolscap an El Dorado? Had she too built costly castles reaching to the skies? Had she talked to her own heart of the certainty of possibilities? In the solitude of soul into which she seemed to have retired, had she sketched the outline of a landscape, which was never to be filled in?

And was reality horrible after the dream? Were those tears the sobs wherewith youth ever mourns the first touch of the cold water of experience?

Life is so icy, its practical lessons are so stern, that it is no marvel the young weep shudderingly at the plunge, and look back through blinding tears regretfully towards the bank which they can never regain.

If George had spoken at random, he had spoken truly, and truth always travels straight home, for which reason Louise fell on her knees and wept, crying over her manuscripts such tears as unhappy mothers have sometimes cause to shed over their firstborn.

If there had been joy in these things, there was trouble likewise; if, after her travail, she had rejoiced, so now, because of creations which she had brought into the world, she mourned; and George was vainly essaying some word of comfort, hopelessly racking his brain for sentences of consolation, when Beryl came in, and took the office of soother upon herself.

If George Geith had wanted anything more to make him in love with the girl, her conquest would have at that moment been complete. Had the fire needed fuel, there would have been sufficient heaped on it at that moment to make its flames inextinguishable.

There was a something so indescribably tender about the way she took her sister to her; it was so pitiful to see the two clinging to one another. Beryl's sympathy was so true, her self-forgetfulness so real; the look in her brown eyes, as she lifted them to George's face, so vexed and troubled, that

the accountant thought he had never seen so exquisite a home picture as that pair of young creatures seated together on the ground, with arms twining round waist and neck, with heads touching, with flowing dresses intermingling, and lying in masses of light drapery over the dark-green carpet.

• “Don’t cry, dear; don’t cry,” was all the eldest could find to say at first; but as by degrees she gathered from George the cause of the outburst, she murmured better words of comfort, and clearing, by some feminine chemistry, every dark tint out of the future, presented it in such bright hues for Louise’s inspection, that, as the clouds will clear off a child’s face at sight of a pleasant picture, her tears began to cease, and her sobs to grow less frequent.

But she never raised her head from Beryl’s shoulder; she never took her arms away from clasping Beryl’s neck, and the time she listened to the hopeful story her sister whispered; she nestled close to a heart which seemed strong enough and brave enough to bear its own sorrows and another’s too.

“Now, I wonder,” thought George, “what Miss Molossan would have done had she been here;” and he was just considering that the beauty might not have shown herself such an amiable light, when the door opened, and a voice which he instantly recognized from Beryl’s mimicry of it, exclaimed, in tones of the most unequivocal surprise and indignation —

“Well! I’m sure.”

## CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. RICHARD ELSENHAM.

At the sound of the well-known voice, Beryl started to her feet with a suddenness which almost threw Louise on her face.

Good gracious! grandmamma, how you did startle me!" cried, her cheeks all aglow.

"How you have shocked me," retorted her virtuous relative. "Beryl, when will you learn to conduct yourself like a young lady? Rise up, Louise, and sit properly upon a chair. What are you crying about? Dry your eyes this moment, and" — with that stiffening of the back of which Beryl made such a point, "Who is this gentleman, if I may inquire?"

"That gentleman is Mr. Geith, Mrs. Elsenham," said Beryl, who had by this time recovered from her fright; "and — how did you come, grandmamma? how did you get in? I never heard you. Have you seen Matilda?"

"I have seen no one but yourself," answered Mrs. Elsenham. "The hall-door was open; I knocked, I rang; but, as usual, no one attended to the summons. I went into the drawing-room: it was empty. Then, hearing voices, I tried the library."

"I am very sorry," said Beryl, apologetically; "won't you come up-stairs now, and take off your bonnet?"

"I suppose Gibbs is with you?" And Beryl manœuvred her grandmother to the door, from which point she shot back a comical glance towards George, who had remained standing from the time of Mrs. Elsenham's appearance. As for

Louise, at an early period she had effected her escape from the room; and Beryl, as usual, was left to meet the storm which she knew would be sure to burst when once the door closed behind them.

"Sha'n't I catch it?" said the look she cast towards George, as plainly as a look could speak; and it would not be affirming too much to say that Beryl rather enjoyed the idea of the scolding, which she intended to reproduce for her friend's benefit at the earliest opportunity.

For the young lady was perfectly indifferent to anything her grandmother chose to say to her.

"Hard words break no bones," she remarked to George afterwards; "and I am, thank goodness, too old now to have my ears boxed. How that respectable relative of mine used to make them tingle!"

If scolding could have made them do so, Beryl's feeling need not have been envied; but, as she remarked, "Such trifling thing as her grandmother's opinion produced no effect upon her."

On George, however, Mrs. Elsenham's words of wisdom fell with the sharpness of hail. Her worldly ideas came upon him like frost in summer; and when into his Eden this ancient serpent entered, he felt that the sooner he got out of Paradise the better it might be for him and every other person concerned.

Not all Beryl's powers of mimicry could reconcile him to Mrs. Elsenham's peculiarities. The minutes which the young lady stole in order to tell him Granny's "latest" could not make him feel other than perfect detestation for the manner in which said Granny tracked Beryl's footsteps and compel her to make ignominious and hurried retreat from the library on to the terrace.

From the minute Mrs. Elsenham re-closed the door, Beryl's face reappeared at the window; and the hiding and seeking at which the pair played, the lurking behind ivy and honey suckles, and the triumphant flights which Beryl effected

were amazingly amusing and exciting. During the whole of his life at the Dower House George Geith had never laughed so much as he did now at grand-daughter and grandmother; but it was intolerable to have to laugh silently, and at times when Beryl was within ear-shot, when her last sentence was scarcely spoken, he found it almost impossible to reply to Mrs. Elsenham's inquiries with necessary gravity. What the lady suspected — whether she thought Beryl was making love to him or he to Beryl; whether she guessed Beryl was ridiculing her, or imagined she was making the account-ant's stay too agreeable, George could not decide; he only knew that Mrs. Elsenham laid herself out to be unpleasant, and that in this laudable design she succeeded to perfection.

For to him her manner was insufferable. If he had been a servant, and necessary to her comfort, or conducive to her convenience, she might have treated him with some consideration and courtesy; but, as he happened only to be a man in business, she missed no opportunity of letting him know his rung of the social ladder was very near the ground.

To George she was like a perpetual blister. It seemed as though she were trying to enter a continual protest against his presence in the house, and the feeling wherewith it pleased the owner thereof to regard him. Cordially he hated her, her maid, and her dog, a nasty, snarling, yelping cross-grained King Charles, that always had something the matter with its throat, which rendered necessary external applications of oil, and the internal administration of cream.

"I should like to put a stone round its neck," observed George to Beryl.

"I shall kill it some day, I know," she replied; "and then if Granny can hang me for wilful murder, I shall die the death."

As for Mr. Elsenham, senior, the gentleman who always travelled in his sister-in-law's company, he was a perfectly unoffending personage, who took to George amazingly, as-

sured him he would get on, told him he had once been a city man himself, and that he had made a deal of money. "A very great deal," he added, champing his toothless jaws the while. "Ah! the city's the place where all's said and done; and the west is very nice, and the country is very pleasant — give me the city."

And then the accountant wondered if this old man, who had money and leisure, really would like to return to a dull city office, and pore over musty books.

With the sunlight streaming over him, he forgot that the sun had almost done shining anywhere for Mr. Elsenham, and that he was looking back as he spoke to days when even a city office seemed gay and cheerful; to days when he was young, and life lay all before him.

It was funny to notice how jealous Mrs. Elsenham became of her kinsman's liking for the accountant; how constantly she interposed her portly figure between them; how frequently she bore Dives off in triumph to read good books to him, over which he fell asleep.

Beryl's description of these readings, and of the way in which Mr. Elsenham seized on any chance of escape from them, was irresistibly comic. Indeed, what was there in those days that was not comic, save the state of Mr. Molozane's affairs, and the certainty that the accounts were nearly finished, and that George's holiday was consequently almost ended.

One other thing also, perhaps, was not ludicrous — a new phase of Mr. Richard Elsenham's character; one for which George Geith could have kicked him from Withefell to London without wearying of the exercise, viz., getting dead drunk when a suitable opportunity offered, and boasting in his cups that Beryl liked him better than she liked anybody else on earth.

"I'd have but to hold up my finger," he hiccupped, as he and George walked home from Withefell, "and — she'd come. Matilda's not my choice — damn her — she's the

devil's; and if the devil was dead, and I had her money, I'd have Beryl; and" — with an awful lurch, which nearly capsized his companion — "Beryl would have me."

"She would not," said George, provoked out of his silence.

"She — would," affirmed her admirer; "she likes me better — than she does — Wern;" and Mr. Elsenham plumped down on the side-path, and commenced invoking blessings on his Beryl.

"Get up, you brute!" exclaimed George; and he shook his companion, who, catching his hand by a maudling —

"I'm sorry for you, old fellow; I like you; you're a trump. But you mistake; you think Beryl likes you? she don't. I know Beryl, and I know — she's — a humbug."

Having vouchsafed which piece of information, Mr. Elsenham fell back into the accountant's arms.

"It would serve you right to leave you to sleep in the road," remarked Mr. Geith, while he endeavored to steady his companion's steps.

"Beryl will — marry — Wern," proceeded Miss Moline's fiancé; "when she can't have me she'll take the highest bidder. If I'd the spirit of a mouse, I'd send Matilda to the right-about, hang her, and take Beryl."

And after this statement, Mr. Elsenham began to sing "Lizzie Lindsay" at the highest pitch of his voice.

Whether it was that the thought of Lord Ronald Clanronald's happiness proved too much for him, or that the idea of George Geith's misery touched his heart, I do not know, but when he came to the last line of the song, which states that the energetic young person whose adventures it records had gone off —

"His pride and his darling to be."

Mr. Richard Elsenham commenced whimpering, and took George entirely into his confidence.

"I'd rather see her your wife than Wern's," he said; "Wern would not come home with me as you are doing;

Wern would send his footman with a pair of cursed calves; Wern's a milksop; Wern's a saint; he does not smoke; and if Beryl marries him I'll never go and see her, I'll cut her, I'll disown her, I'll be —— if I don't."

The foregoing sentence in which, as Dick Elsenham spoke it, every second word was an oath, was jerked out by the drunken idiot as he staggered along the path, leaning on the accountant's arm.

With what feelings George Geith listened to it, I think I need not record; but as Dick proceeded to say that Beryl was only going to marry the saint for an establishment, and that her father had put her up to it, and that when she was mistress of the Park, Mr. Wern would be nowhere, his companion grew so furious that he could not help stopping short, and shaking Mr. Elsenham till the young man had scarcely a breath left to draw.

"If you can think of nothing good to say about your relations, for God's sake hold your tongue," he observed; "don't soil your cousin's name by dragging it through the mire and dirt of your own nature; for if you do, I'll leave you to find your way back to the Dower House as best you can."

Whereupon Mr. Elsenham became pathetic, and entreated George not to desert him.

"I have nobody in the world," he wept; "and I'm fond of you; I love you like a brother."

"If you were my brother I'd thrash you till I was tired; I would certainly cure you of making a beast of yourself."

"It — was — all — that — claret," explained Mr. Elsenham; and he rambled on for some time about the devilish good wine the snob had in his cellar, and about what a grand thing it was for swells that there were snobs who were glad to entertain them.

All the meanness and vulgarity of the man's nature revealed itself to George's gaze during the course of that interminable walk; all his arrogance, self-conceit, want of truth, and want of principle, were exhibited by Miss Mel-



same's suitor for the accountant's benefit, and he was at last provoked to say, —

"If your cousin has ever seen you like this, I don't wonder at her hating you."

"Hate me! she loves me; she sits up for me; Beryl likes the ground I walk on; and I love Beryl; and she loves me. You thought perhaps she liked you, old fellow, but that was only because we kept it—so close—so—dark."

After that George Geith held his peace. Out of the past there came to him the proverbs once so familiar: "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit." "Speak not in the ears of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words." "Though thou shouldst bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him."

At the moment, I am afraid the accountant wished he had the braying of that lump of folly, laziness, conceit, and arrogance, that he had the felicity of escorting back to the Dower House, where, exactly as Mr. Elsenham had said, Beryl was sitting up for them.

"I—told—you so," said her cousin, with drunken gravity, propping himself up against one corner of the hall, and shaking his head solemnly at George, who could scarcely resist laughing at the figure the man presented. "Beryl—a'n't you—fond of me?"

"No, I am not," answered Beryl; "and if you do not go to bed at once, I shall tell Granny about you to-morrow."

"You may tell the—devil," retorted Mr. Elsenham; and he thrust his hands into his pockets, and surveyed his cousin with an idiotic smile.

"Wait—till—till—you Beryl; we had sthunning—dinner—and I made—myself—pleasant—to Miss Finch."

"I wish you were married to her," said Beryl, in an audible aside.

"And Wern was there — and — con — dicted me — and if — you take him Beryl, I'll — never be friends with you — never."

At which stage Mr. Elsenham's hat, that had previously been very much on one side, fell off; and whilst he was vainly attempting to pick it up, Beryl took the opportunity of asking Mr. Geith to get him to go to bed.

It was by no means a difficult task, for being almost too tipsy to be troublesome, he suffered George to help him upstairs, where, after a vain attempt to pull off a very tight pair of boots, George left him to his fate.

"Does Miss Molozane know?" the accountant could not help asking Beryl next morning.

"Of course she does; she has seen him what he calls 'moppy' often enough. Oh! indeed Dick is a very nice young man, and will make an admirable husband."

Which answer, and the indignant sarcasm of Beryl's manner as she spoke it, caused Mr. Geith to reflect, as he travelled from St. Margaret's to London, that it was a most difficult thing for girls to get married to their minds than he had once supposed.

Given, for instance, the Molozanes. The two eldest could certainly settle well if they chose, but then, would that settling be at all to their satisfaction? He saw how hard it would be for them to meet with exactly the suitable person. Situated as they were, they could scarcely hope to unite love and competence, or competence and love. They might in one sense make great matches, secure husbands who could at once raise them to affluence, and give them every advantage to which their birth entitled them. The sets-off against those matches were the impossibility of such girls as they really and truly loved the husbands who thus endowed them with all manner of worldly possessions; the differences of opinion and taste that would be certain to arise; and in Matilda's case the tortures, consequent on his vulgarity, to which she would be subjected if she were to discard her cousin, and marry **Finch**.

That she had chosen that which she believed the lesser evil, George could well understand; and although he now cordially detested Mr. Richard Elsenham, he could not but admit that perhaps, considering her nature, she had chosen wisely.

But how would it be with Beryl? In all honesty, putting himself and his own personal feelings out of the question, how would it fare with her if she married Mr. Wern?

Would she — could she — ever settle down into a suitable wife for a grave, good, sensible man, for whom she did not feel one atom of affection? Would not the dull, decorous life kill her? Would she not sicken of the poor, weary of her wealth, die of the Sundays, despair through the week? Could she ever get fond — really fond — of one so utterly her opposite? As she nurtured, if she ever did nurture, would not the gap widen? Would not he get more solemn — she more eager for gayety, more impatient of control?

Would not that love which George felt satisfied she had to give to some one, prove her curse sooner or later?

But there George stopped. Beyond her marriage, if she did marry, there lay a desert of years over which he never could fancy her light feet journeying.

Just the same then, as previously, he found he could not imagine Beryl married — Beryl staid.

For a moment he let himself try to picture his circumstances altered, and her his wife; but he found he could not realize that.

The only dream he was able to conceive true was this: that for some reason or other he might have always to be coming and going to and from the Dower House; and that as he went and came he should always find Beryl there, and Beryl still the same.

In that waking dream the summer was perpetual; he saw no dark wintry days, he beheld no snow on the ground, no leafless trees tossing their branches to the stormy sky. The fields were ever green, the waters were ever clear; the

flowers never faded; men and women never grew old. No sorrow entered into that vision; no tears dimmed bright eyes; no warm hearts changed and grew cold; no tongues wearied; no hard words were uttered; all faces wore perpetual smiles.

There was no thought of parting, no mention of farewell; and the man, the best portion of whose life had been spent facing all manner of stern realities, gave himself up to the fascination of his dreams, and letting his sense sleep while he perfected it, went wandering on through Elysian fields, till the engine, rushing with a snort, and a shriek, and a whistle, into the Shoreditch station, brought him back to the life which it was his duty and his interest to live with all his energies awake.

“Was I dreaming of heaven?” he thought, as he passed out with the crowd, and walked down Bishopsgate Street, and thence across St. Mary Axe, bearing steadily toward Fen Court.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## BACK TO TOWN.

It is curious that there should always be such a grievous *quid* placed against the *quo* of even our most innocent pleasures ; that so surely as a man leaves his business and enjoys the shortest possible period of recreation, he should find on his return things going wrong ; disagreeable letters piled on his desk, containing imperative demands from duns, announcements of suspensions, or perhaps intelligence that some friendly neighbor has been doing his best to damage his connection by going round his customers, or tampering with his clients.

Whether it is that the change from freedom to anxiety makes a man less fitted to bear these annoyances patiently, or that the troubles of every day, instead of being met and cleared away before closing-time each evening, are thus accumulated in one formidable heap, I can scarcely tell ; all I know is, that the first day at home, or at office, after a long absence, is detestable ; it is a man's sorrowful return to school after the holidays ; it is extra lessons and additional punishments, from sunrise to sunset.

George Geith found it disagreeable, at any rate, for he had been in town for a few hours on the previous Friday, and now it was but Wednesday in the following week ; but still in that short time, he discovered that business had not been going well, and that he must never take so long a holiday for the future.

Mr. Foss was ill, to commence with ; he had known that,

but he had depended on his other clerk keeping close to the office, and attending to customers, instead of which it appeared that his other clerk had taken holiday too, and that all persons who climbed up to his door had been solaced with the very definite information that he would "Return in an hour," which they derived from a small card hung on the panel. How many customers had been offended during a few days of absence? How many had come back at the expiration of an hour, half-a-dozen times, and then departed never to return, it would be useless to tell. Everything was wrong, everything in confusion. Letters that ought to have been attended to were lying unopened; notices that should have been seen to were resting peacefully on his desk.

Had he been at Fen Court during the whole of the previous week, it is more than probable he would not have done a stroke of fresh business; but as he chanced to be away, fresh business had poured in to be neglected.

Hanging up his hat, and putting on his office-coat, the accountant, without wasting an unnecessary second in vain regrets, got to work. He was clear of the Dower House now, and could work; and the amount of business he managed to get through that morning proved a surprise even to himself.

"So you're back at last," said Mr. Bemmidge, opening the door of the inner office, and greeting George with a grasp which made the accountant's fingers tingle. "I was thinking of going down to see whether you were living or dead or if you were going to set up in business at that outlandish place where you've been staying."

"I have often been here, though you have not seen me," answered his friend; "and I called at your office not many days since; but your clerk said you had gone to Brighton."

"So I had; Mrs. B. and the children are all down there. I ran down from Saturday till Monday. Lor' bless you can't take such holidays as you do. I can't stay away a month at a time, and only pay angels' visits to my old

as saying to my wife, Hertfordshire must surely hold  
ne great attraction for you. Eh! is that it?"

"The attraction of hard work," answered the hypocrite,  
which is enough to take me anywhere. And the worst of  
it is, the work is not finished yet; and how I am ever to get  
it finished I do not know."

"Well, I must say you look as if the work had agreed  
with you," observed Mr. Bemmidge, stepping back in order  
to obtain a better view. "You are worth twenty of the man  
you were in the early part of the summer. If you want to  
insure your life, now's the time."

"What should I want to insure my life for? I have  
neither kith nor kin."

"But it is never too late to repair that. We have all been  
expecting to hear of your marriage this fortnight past. Mrs.  
B. said she was certain — nothing but a lady could be keep-  
ing you so long out of town."

"Which shows how little Mrs. Bemmidge knows of me,"  
replied George. "Years and years ago I married business,  
and I have seen nothing, so far, that could make me unfaith-  
ful to my choice — nothing certainly in Hertfordshire;" and  
George uttered this untruth with an appearance of the frank-  
est sincerity.

"Well, I am glad you have had the change, at any rate;  
you look a hundred per cent. the better for it; and I dare  
say you feel a new creature."

"It has certainly done me a great deal of good," George  
replied; "but health has been purchased too dearly in this  
instance, I am afraid. Being out of town has done my busi-  
ness no good."

"But you were at work in the country, you say?"

"Yes; but work in the country never pays like work in  
town. To be sure," added George, carelessly, "it may bring  
new town-work, for Mr. Finch, you know, — Finch & Cross,  
of Fore Street, — has promised to send me what business he  
can."

"Edward Finch!" exclaimed Mr. Bemmidge. "If you can get into his good books, your fortune's made."

"And I have also met Mr. Wern, head partner in the great druggist's house in Little Britain, you know the firm I mean; and he says he can put a good deal in my way, so that, altogether, perhaps my visit to Hertfordshire may not prove quite unproductive."

And George uttered this sentence, looking straight into Mr. Bemmidge's face, and speaking as if during the entire time of his absence he had never spared a thought for anything but business.

Heavens! what deceivers we are! How calmly we go on cheating ourselves and our neighbors, till even those who know us best can hardly tell which part of our lives is true, and which false. Had Beryl Molozane heard George Geith talking to his friend, she would really have fancied all he had thought of at the Dower House was his fee, and extending his connection; and she would have turned away heart-sick at the idea that all their pleasant hours he had deemed wasted, that all their happy holiday was considered unproductive, save in as far as it brought him into contact with two good city men.

As for Mr. Bemmidge, he was enchanted to hear of the good company in which his friend had found himself, and he had no hesitation in expressing his surprise at how George had "got at them."

"There is no mystery in the matter," said the accountant; "Mr. Wern is a tenant, and Mr. Finch a neighbor of the gentleman for whom I have been doing business. In the country, you know, great people are not so inaccessible as they seem to be in the city."

"I wish I could meet with some of these nobles, and get a good order for wine out of them," said Mr. Bemmidge, perfectly unconscious that a sneer had lain hidden in the last part of the accountant's sentence.

"I wish you could, if it would help your balance at the



ie year," said George ; but he thought, as he spoke Finch's wines, and felt assured Mr. Bemmidge's seals would not be given house-room.

long been the accountant's opinion, that his friends know good wine from bad, and he could not help as he contrasted the fearful decoctions which Mr. ge had pronounced first-rate, with the pure products vintages wherewith Mr. Finch made expiation for of grammar.

ething seems to be amusing you," said Mr. Bem- with the air of a man ready to take share of a joke. as thinking of Mr. Finch," answered the accountant ; oddity, if ever there was one, and his sister I think still."

ld she suit ? " asked Mr. Bemmidge, significantly. n't know what she might have done thirty years ago," reply, " but she certainly would not now."

's a pity ; but at any rate you seem to have been in ay," remarked the wine-merchant. " I wish I could a chance."

aps you may, some day ; and as I said before, there some profit, for there has been much loss. There's dedly annoying thing to find lying for one," he icking up a letter, which he handed to Mr. Bem- who first read it through attentively, and then agreed as annoying.

ey begin to make objections about discounting," pro- Ir. Geith, " I must shift my account, for it would deuce with me to have to refuse bills ; and I must rem if I cannot get them passed to my credit before due. With an extending business too, like mine, ar becomes very serious indeed."

lon bankers are Herods," said Mr. Bemmidge ; rangle all the young businesses they can lay their u. The fact is, that in another generation or two, l be no small traders at all. Every business will

belong to a millionaire or a company, and men like ourselves will have to be clerks or porters."

"It will be a bad day for England," observed George Geith, "when she sees the last of her middle men." And he felt desperately democratical as he spoke.

"You would think," went on Mr. Bemmidge, "that the bankers here were sworn together to prevent an honest, struggling man rising. There was a merchant in the office the other day from Ireland, and he asked me what the London banks were established for.

"I told him I did not know, unless it was to help the rich to rob the poor. 'What do you think they are for?' said I.

"'Faith, and I don't know,' said he, 'for the devil and other thing can I see that they keep open for, except to have crossed checks paid through them.'"

"And he was right," observed George Geith, sulkily; "they won't discount; they won't advance. I had a check returned to me in the spring with N. S. on it, when I was only two pounds short, and had paid in the day before a couple of hundreds in post bills and country orders."

"What a shame!" remarked Mr. Bemmidge.

"It was a shame," agreed Mr. Geith; "and it might have done me no end of harm had it happened with anybody else than the person it did. I will do the manager the justice to say he apologized, and said if he had known about the post bills he would have had them placed to my credit; but then, as I told him, a bank that is so infernally strict, ought to have people in it who knew everything; and that if their particularity had damaged me, his regret would not have done much good. Keep a balance, indeed! not if I know it. I can employ my capital to a vast deal more advantage in my business than by keeping it shut up in their bank; besides, they would not discount beyond the balance kept, and I might, therefore, just as well cash my own bills, and pocket the discount."

And George, who was by this time very hot and angry, flung down one of the windows with a bang.

"If you like to change your bank and keep a balance, I can tell you a place where they will discount good paper to any amount," said Mr. Bemmidge. "Norton's, in Size Lane. They are old-fashioned people, and have an old-fashioned connection; but if you want a really comfortable, respectable bank, you could not beat Norton's in London: I banked there so long as I could keep a balance, and old Mr. Norton is a man you can go and talk to like a father."

Here was a prospect! One which in this busy world of London is not often presented before a man! To have any person to whom one could go and talk to like a father was wonderful; but for that individual to be a banker took away George's breath, and he answered, somewhat incredulously, that for his part he could never look upon a banker as anything but his natural enemy.

"Oh! yes you could, if you saw Mr. Norton," returned the wine-merchant, calmly; "he is a perfect gentleman of the old school, you would be charmed with him."

"I might, but I am very doubtful," said George. "What balance do they require you to keep?"

"Five hundred." At which intelligence Mr. Geith uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Well, you know it is the usual thing," remarked Mr. Bemmidge; "and then it don't matter how much paper you put in, so long as it is good; and to hand it into Norton's is in itself a letter of credit to city people. I only wish I could get back to them," sighed the wine-merchant; and knowing the state of his pass-book, his friend could well believe his assertion.

"And if one wanted to open an account there, how are they to be got at?" asked Mr. Geith; "for I know I had trouble enough before I was privileged to draw checks on the Merchant's and Tradesman's. It is almost as hard to get into a bank as what it is to compass the Kingdom of Heaven;"

and George began beating a tattoo on his desk, a sure sign with him of increased anger and impatience.

"I'll introduce you, if you like," said Mr. Bemmidge. "Although I don't bank there, Norton still speaks to me in the street."

"What condescension!" remarked the accountant.

"Well, you know, Geith, it is thought condescension in London for a banker to do anything of the kind; and he and I used to be very good friends; and I know he will take my word for your respectability, though I am only in a small way; so if you make up your mind to close with the Merchant's and Tradesman's, I'll go down with you any time you like to Size Lane, and tell Mr. Norton who and what you are. I suppose I need not say that Norton's is a respectable bank."

"Indeed, you need not. I know Norton's are tip-top people; my gentry clients' checks are as often drawn on them as on Coutts; and if you can go down with me now, we will settle the matter at once."

"But about the balance, Geith," suggested the wine merchant, timidly.

"I happen to have six hundred, which was paid to me since I came in; and I take the funds being provided as a sign I am to change my bankers."

"What a business you must be doing," remarked poor Mr. Bemmidge, whose mouth watered at sight of the check.

"Yes, I am doing pretty well, considering," answered the accountant, as he changed his coat and brushed his hat preparatory to sallying forth.

The six hundred was trust-money, which might be needed any day; but George did not think it necessary to tell Mr. Bemmidge everything; indeed, it was part of the man's nature to keep silence. Even from the friend of his heart and the wife of his bosom, had he possessed either, he must have withheld a full and free confidence. In this respect he was the making of a true man of business before he even

entered trade ; and business, and long years of loneliness, and the constant habit of reserve, had all tended to make George Geith as uncommunicative, I mean with regard to his own affairs, as need have been looked for in the length and breadth of London. His was a singular kind of reserve, however, being of an exceedingly annoying and deceptive nature.

There are some people who are, one knows, keeping things back, telling nothing, constantly putting their thoughts, plans, wishes, hopes, fears, under lock and key ; and for these individuals one is prepared and willing to let them go on their own way till the end of the chapter. There are others, again, who, though sealed books to most, are perfectly frank and unreserved towards a few who can tell a story, if they commence to tell it all straight through without any lie, or mental reservation ; whilst a third class appear to be candid, and yet are always hiding away something from their nearest and dearest.

Like Ananias and Sapphira — making the comparison with all reverence — they profess to be giving all, whilst they keep back a part ; they play with everything which is noblest and purest in humanity, with its sympathies, its trust, its yearning for perfect confidence ; and because George Geith did this, because, whilst making believe to bestow, he was secretly withholding, I call his peculiarity a sin ; this base of his character, detestable.

From a business point of view, perhaps it was a light thing to pass off as his own six hundred pounds, one penny of which did not belong to him.

It might be a venial fault in that instance ; but George carried the same thing with him into every circumstance of his life, and was false about trifles when he might just as easily have been true.

He was not particular about the genuineness of his excuses when excuses were needed ; he did not care about a gloss being false, provided it served his purpose ; and ac-

cordingly he felt no prickings of conscience, as he put on his coat and brushed his hat, about having implied an untruth to Mr. Bemmidge.

The money was his *pro tem.*, and he would take advantage of having it to transfer his account to another bank, where he could soon get sufficient paper "melted" — to borrow an expression from Mr. Foss — to set him square.

"Nothing venture, nothing have," had for long been George Geith's motto; and yet he was not rich. He was not even speculative. He never threw down his stakes on the chance of a particular color turning up; rather, he had the cards, and played them boldly and rapidly.

To keep the business ball constantly moving had been his aim for years; and to be thwarted in this laudable endeavor by the perverseness of a banker was more than his temper could bear.

"An honest tradesman," he remarked to Mr. Bemmidge, "has to be content to see his two or two and a half per cent; but where these banks rob to pay the dividends they do, is a mystery to me. I should like to have the overhauling of some of their books; I wonder what holes I should find to pick out in them." And so he frowned and fretted whilst the pair walked along Fenchurch Street, and then to the Merchant's and Tradesman's, where George paid the six hundred in with a certain sense of triumph and victory.

Afterwards, he accompanied Mr. Bemmidge to Size Lane, in which cheerful locality Norton's bank had been established for upwards of a century.

Externally, the bank was dingy; internally, it was dirty. Further, it was dark, small, and unimposing. At the Merchant's and Tradesman's all was plate glass, frescos, mouldings, handsome flooring, elaborate ceilings. Behind counters, the highly-polished mahogany whereof shone like a mirror, were ranged rows of clerks, who made themselves as generally disagreeable as it was in the power of bank clerks to do; and in remoter regions, separated by glazed partitions

from the vulgar herd, was the sanctum of the manager — a gentleman who united the conciliating manners of a beau with the appearance of a fop.

In Size Lane, how different! Through a narrow doorway the visitors squeezed themselves into the bank, which was dark even in the summer-time, by reason of unclean windows, dingy walls, a pervading presence of green baize, and absence of even the most ordinary cleanliness. Spiders loved Size Lane; they spun their cobwebs undisturbed in the corners of Norton's bank; they caught flies till their nets became such perfect sepulchres that they were forced to build fresh cities for themselves and families.

The dust of years lay thick on the shelves; ink, spilled by generations of clerks, stained the desks and floor. The once green baize, which covered the door leading off to Mr. Norton's private room, had faded to a yellowish brown; the short curtains, suspended from brass rods, that served to hide the then clerks from too curious observation, were of any color but red; whilst the brass rods might well have passed for bronze.

It was generally understood about the establishment that the floor was scrubbed once a week; but if this were so, the boards certainly proved ungrateful for the pains bestowed upon them.

Mr. Geith thought he had never set his foot in a dirtier place; but there was an air of money about it, of there being such plenty at the owners' backs that they could afford to dispense with the modern adjuncts of decent furniture, cleanliness, and light, which went far to impress the accountant in favor of his new bankers.

We are all a little apt to think that where there is much glitter there can be no gold, and the more ragged the miser dresses the larger and deeper, we imagine, must be his money-chests. Though he had seen enough of life to get rid of these prejudices, George Geith was still swayed by them, and entered Mr. Norton's reception-room in a contented state of mind.

Somewhat awkwardly Mr. Bemmidge performed the ceremony of introduction, and then retired into total silence, leaving his friend to talk to Mr. Norton as he might to his father, if he could.

Which he could not. Spite of the man's suavity, his courtesy, his pleasure at seeing them, his interesting remarks on the weather, and his readiness to receive him as a client, the accountant did not like Mr. Norton.

"He makes my flesh creep," he remarked to Mr. Bemmidge as they got out once again into the sunshine. "Good heavens! did you hear with what *gout* he gave the account of that poor fellow's arrest? I declare, when he laid his hand on my shoulder, I felt inclined to get up and fight him. He's a hypocrite, Bemmidge; I'm sure he is. Spite of all his nonsense about their consideration for the father, and pity for the son, he had not an atom of compassion for either of them.

"Why could he not have paid the money, and hushed up the matter? The old scoundrel, he could well have afforded it, I'll be bound."

"It was confoundedly sharp practice," said Mr. Bemmidge, with a troubled face. "Mr. Geith, I knew that young fellow once; he was as nice a lad as you would wish to see; and the father is a very respectable man, doing a good small trade in the borough."

"I think I shall go and hear the trial;" and as he wended his way back to Fen Court, George, after parting from his friend, went over all the circumstances of the interview, and found that the more he thought about Mr. Norton, the less he liked him.

The banker was a man of about the middle height, but so thin and wiry and erect, that he looked considerably taller than was actually the case. He had a long nose, thin lips, clear blue eyes, that looked a person through and through, and the quietest, most conciliating manners that ever a man made capital out of.



an individual whose affability might easily win of a stranger in an inferior station, and whose quiet could take people of a rank equal or superior to his

relation to the great Snareham Geiths?" he had asked, when George, at his request, repeated the question to this accountant replied in the

"I have had some business with the next presumptive Arthur Geith," remarked the banker, "or perhaps I may say, with Mrs. Arthur Geith. There are not the original family left now, I believe. There was a clergyman."

He believed there was.

"Do you know if anything has been heard of him lately?" the accountant was afraid there had not; and, as he said, the banker looked hard at one another, and came to a standing on the spot.

"Did it take me there? was it chance, or was it fate? or does it move in circles, which bring us ever round and round the same point again? Am I, after all these years, to my family, and to people who know them? Would an old man go and say that I was a clergyman, that I was an accountant? Will he go and wonder why I left the country and talk on the subject before my face?" And the old strong agony, an agony which he thought he never had to encounter more, George covered with his hands, and looked back over the toil of the independence of the present to the past which had held so much misery for him.

He came humbly, and with a changed expression from that which he had borne when he went out, he thanked God that his enemy, his relentless enemy, was dead; that no one were searching him out; that he lived now in no place where he might be following behind him, waiting to lay his hand on his shoulder, and make his flesh creep.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## DAY DREAMS.

It was some days before George Geith was able completely to shake off the disagreeable recollections which his interview with the banker had revived.

For so long a time he had forgotten the past, that to have it suddenly reproduced before him was like waking from calm sleep and pleasant dreams to the memory of some grievous trouble which has been forgotten during slumber.

For the happiness of a recent present, the past of long ago, with its temptations, which he had not resisted; with its allurements, which had successfully enticed him; with its sorrows, which he had not encountered manfully; with its shame, which he dreaded to face, had all gone down among those dead memories which we are forced to entomb in our hearts.

He had hidden their sepulchres away even from his own sight. He had hung roses and garlands over them, and forgotten there were graves below. He had strewed flowers, fresh flowers, gathered for him by the hands of the living, over the bodies he had confined. He had looked out over a new existence, and found it to be very lovely; and behold! just as he was going out to greet it, there came a general resurrection, and the woes and griefs, put aside as he thought forever, trooped back with ghastly faces to meet him on the threshold of a happier life.

Was it chance, accident, coincidence, or fate? he asked himself, as he thought over the matter calmly. Was it a

ing? Pooh! what did he care if all the world knew he had been a clergyman; that he had forsaken the Church for every good and sufficient reasons?

Supposing even those reasons were posted up on the Royal Exchange, what would be the harm? If the story of his youth folly, which had entailed such an estate of labor and sorrow on his early manhood, could be suppressed, well and good; but if, through any accident, it was made public, why, that was another matter, and good still.

In fact, if people generally came once to understand that he had been a clergyman, he thought it would be better for them also to understand why he had relinquished his profession; but, after all, where was the necessity for him to be boasting himself by conjuring up possibilities? Who was he to tell anything about him? Who knew anything about him for certain? Was he not taking fright at shadows starting at the rustling of straws?

Mr. Norton did suspect, what then? Supposing he communicated his suspicion to Mrs. Arthur Geith, what would be the result? Sir Mark and Lady Geith knew of his whereabouts, what therefore could it signify whether or not all the other members of his family were made acquainted with it? Let the past go down into the deep; and George tied up the knot about its neck and flung it over again into the waters of oblivion.

The certain advantages of banking with Norton, of Size Street, soon made him forget the unpleasant impression left in his mind by his first interview with the head of the firm. He was like a little capital to him, having his bills payable on such a first-class bank. Drawing his checks on Norton gave him a certain standing amongst his clients; and though he knew it was all humbug; though he knew his bills were in reality have been just as good paper if Aldgate had been written on them, he still was glad to be taken in to fall in with popular ideas, and endeavored to humor popular prejudices to the fullest extent.

It occurs to me, at this point, that the reader may want to know what an accountant could possibly have to do with acceptances; why he should ever have required to make a bill of his own payable anywhere. To which inquiry I may safely answer that there is scarcely a business-man in London, the aim and object of whose life is not to get his acceptances into circulation.

Bills are to the trader precisely what notes are to the banker — pieces of paper which it is supposed represents a given amount of locked-up capital; and which enable him to do four times the business that would otherwise be possible for him to adventure, if he were always compelled to wait until his money was free — until he had cash in hand wherewith to purchase and to speculate.

Bills are the long credits business accords to her favorite children, and indeed it is the abuse of this privilege rather than its use, which makes the habitual practice of bill-issuing to stink in the nostrils of prudent and honest men.

Ready money is best, they whisper; pay cash, they entreat; — and the advice would be excellent if in London people ever had ready money; if they ever had the cash wherewith to pay; if business-men had not always money locked up in goods which it would be loss and ruin for them to attempt to realize.

The danger of bills is, that men are tempted so often to issue paper beyond the amount of their actual capital; in which case should the venture in which they are engaged not turn out well, bankruptcy inevitably follows. There was no fear of George Geith falling into this error, however; for if he did speculate a little outside his legitimate business, he speculated warily. Up to the time of his emancipation, he had steadily resisted the allurements of possibilities. Let an undertaking look ever so fair, he had passed on the other side, and refused to touch it. He was afraid to risk a sixpence on any venture, let it look as promising as it would; and, therefore, up to the time when you,

my reader, first made his acquaintance, he had been simply and purely an accountant — nothing more.

Once free, however, once he had realized the fact that his earnings were his own, to do what he liked with, that he had no further need to lay by for a special object, for one sole end, he began to look about for secure investments, for safe speculation, whereby he might hasten the process of money-making, and add hundred to hundred with greater rapidity than had hitherto been the case.

The great evil of his own business he had found to be, its entire dependence on his own exertions. In it there was no casting of seed into the ground, and then leisure till the harvest; no sending forth of vessels, and idleness till their white sails reappeared in the offing. Ill or well, if his business were to succeed, he must be at his post. Whether tired or not, he must still continue that weary reckoning up of columns, that never ending addition, that constant calculation which in time wears out the strongest constitution, and weakens the perceptions of the clearest head. Even to himself, George Geith could not deny but that the toil had told, that the business chains had worn down into his flesh, and that but for his holiday he might not have been able to continue at the same pace the race with fortune which for years he had been running.

For which reason he turned his attention towards increasing his capital still more quickly, and, to get herewith one of his clients, a man of experience and high business standing, speculated in such colonial products as seemed the safest venture, and promised the quickest returns.

And now the accountant began to do amazingly well. In all businesses it is the first step which costs. Once that step is made successfully, the rest, to an energetic and sensible man, is easy; and George Geith was both. Beyond all things he was practical, and he had no visions of a great future to be secured by any means, save that of hard and unceasing work.

He did not speculate in order to sit down idle; he merely did so to accelerate his progress upwards, and to enable him to vary his occupation.

Figures! Sometimes now he grew dizzy after he had been calculating for hours; and he knew enough of man's physical constitution, and had heard enough of evil resulting to others from inattention to such symptoms, to induce him to turn his thoughts to some business which should not tax his brain so much as did that of an accountant.

Merely as an accountant, however, he was doing remarkably well: clients tripped in one after another. Mr. Finch was as good as his word, and Mr. Wern perhaps a little better; for both of which reasons George soon found himself rising into note.

From the moment that he began to bank at Norton's, fortune seemed never weary of showering prizes upon him. Everything he touched turned out prosperously. He made money, as Mr. Foss phrased it, "like dirt"; and, sitting in his office in Fen Court, looking out on the trees, the leaves of which were now brown and withering, it might be that some vision of future wealth, of a happy home, of a wife like Beryl Molozane, began to float vaguely before him.

Separated from her, fearful that in the time to come he should never again be domesticated in that dear old house, the same as he had been in the days that seemed so far, far away, he began to understand that life without Beryl would to him be lifeless, that money would be valueless, that the future would be dark and barren; whilst, give him wealth and Beryl, a fair business, a pleasant country-house, and the Queen on her throne would be less happy than the accountant at Fen Court.

A country-house, like the Dower House, only nearer town: Beryl young, Beryl gay, Beryl something from which no man had the right to separate him; Beryl to greet him, Beryl to talk to him, Beryl to love him; good heaven, what a prospect! A home without sickness, without shadow,

without anxiety ; a home with a south aspect, into which the sun shone even in the winter ; a home where flowers were always blooming, where there was no vulgarity, no shortness, no worrying about servants, no living beyond their means, no keeping up of appearances ; nothing but peace, and joy, and comfort, and welcoming smiles and sunshine ! Whenever George Geith laid down his pen, and looked out at the backs of the houses in Cullum Street, I think he did not see the gloomy walls that encircle the graveyard, but rather the Dower House, with its glory of roses, its wealth of beauty, and Beryl standing beside him in its old-fashioned garden, his for life !

Painted on the blackened walls, he beheld this picture ; day by day, as money came in faster, as business kept on increasing, it grew more real to him.

Above the graves, behind the trees, he could see the glory of that ideal home ; and he never thought — have pity on the dreamer ! — that over tombs he should have to travel to find it ; that weeping, scalding tears, stumbling over bones, groping among dust and ashes, he would in future years have to pass solitary through earth, looking for the rest to come !

Oh dreams ! oh visions ! oh fair illusions and enchanting hopes ! does earth hold aught more mournful than the memory of some unfulfilled promises ? Sadder than dead children are they to our thoughts. Can we ever coffin and bury them ?

Can we ever forget that these dream sons and daughters, for whom there is no resurrection, have been with us and are departed ; that their dear faces have smiled upon us, and may return to lighten the darkness of our onward path no more.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## ALTERNATIVES.

It must not be imagined, that, whilst George Geith was dreaming dreams and seeing visions, he neglected any part of his business ; more particularly that portion of it which had connection with Mr. Molozane.

On the contrary, he worked assiduously, and made haste to thread the mazes of figures he had brought away from the Dower House, in order to put them into some sort of intelligible form in town. When he had accomplished this feat, it had been arranged he was to run down to Withersell again, and let Mr. Molozane know the best or the worst by word of mouth rather than by letter.

Having promised which fact, it is scarcely necessary for me to add that no grass grew under the accountant's feet whilst he cut and pruned Mr. Molozane's affairs into shape.

He had long known what the result must prove ; and yet when all was finished, when the debit and credit lay before him, when the balance sheet, in which there appeared no balance, was ready for presentation to his employer, George Geith hesitated and grew cowardly.

He would rather any hand but his had to strike the blow ; any tongue beside his own to tell the poor, proud gentleman there was no hope, that the disease was past remedy, the cancer too deep for any surgeon's knife to cure.

It seemed so like ingratitude for him to announce inevitable ruin, for one who had been made so welcome, who had been so unutterably happy at the Dower House, to assume



the owner he must leave it, and earn his own and his children's bread as best he might?

To sensitiveness, to over-delicacy in regard of others' feelings, George Geith could lay no claim; but he felt there would be something almost brutal in forcing such news on any man, and accordingly he laid by the papers when they were completed, and deferred making his communication, until a letter from Mr. Molozane left but one course open for him, which was to go to the Dower House and tell the man who had been kind to him, that the accounts were correct, and that he was — a beggar!

And as he arrived at this inevitable conclusion, the wind swept mournfully through the branches of the trees in the churchyard, and with sobs and moans stripped the withered leaves off the branches and strewed them on the grass.

Winter comes to all things created, that live long enough to feel its frosts. Snow veils the greenest fields, ice binds the clearest streams, the rain and the wind beat down the heads of the fairest flowers, and the leaves of June's roses lie rotting on the earth, when November fogs succeed to the summer sunshine.

Winter comes to all things earthly. It came and dwelt even in the garden at the Dower House; and when George Geith went down into Hertfordshire again, he found that the leaves were off the trees, that the flowers were withered and gone, that the roads where the dust had lain thick were now deep in mud, and that the fields, wherein the first breath of a new life had touched his cheek, were sopping and soaking with wet.

Nevertheless, it was to the Dower House he was journeying; and even had the snow lain thick on the ground, had frost and ice chilled the blood in his veins, George Geith would not have cared, providing always each step he took brought him nearer and nearer to the dear old home.

Where on his arrival he found no visitors stopping, and the same cordial welcome as ever for himself. Blazing fires

in the room in lieu of the former sunshine without, closed windows and doors instead of the open-air life he remembered. What then? it was still home to George Geith; winter does not chill warm hearts or change frank natures, and the Dower House in November held for this man of business the same rich treasures as it had contained in July.

And yet he could see a difference, not towards himself, but in the inmates. Miss Molozone seemed less at ease than formerly, Beryl a trifle graver, Louise more womanly, Mr. Molozone — but here George's heart failed him, the man appeared to have a prevision of what was coming, and to have nerved himself to meet the worst. And what a worst it was! Looking from the sunny warmth of the Dower House to the cold and damp without, contrasting the calm of that sheltered haven with the storms and tempests of the outer world, George Geith felt that he might in one way just as well have brought a warrant for execution in his hand as the statement which confirmed all the worst fears they had ever entertained, which virtually contained for Mr. Molozone notice of ejection from the last piece of ground he might ever call his.

But the truth had to be told; and after dinner, when he and his host sat over their wine, he explained exactly how affairs stood, and proved that the first call of the Sythlow mines would bring matters to a crisis. Laying his papers on the table, he pointed out the meaning of the different entries to Mr. Molozone, who, after a moment's scrutiny, pushed the documents aside, and then said with a weary sigh, —

“It has turned out just as I expected them, as I feared;” and he rose and walked up and down the room once or twice, as though struggling with an emotion which he did not wish George to witness.

He had expected, he had feared, but here was certainty, and certainty is always harder to endure than dread.

“What am I to do?” he broke out at last; “where am I

to go? what is to become of my girls? Oh! those cursed mines; if I had only the money now I vested in the shares, I could live, we could live here comfortably."

"You derive no income, no small income, I mean, from any other source?" asked the accountant.

"None; you see exactly how I stand; you know as much about my affairs as I do myself. Matilda will marry her cousin, so she is, I may say, provided for; but the other two have nothing, nor the chance of anything;" and he sat down again and looked at the fire, whilst George held his peace.

"I must work, I suppose," began Mr. Molozane, after a pause; "but who would have me? who would find any use for such a person as myself? I might be an agent, or land-steward, or bailiff, to be sure. We could live on little — we have lived on little; and, oh! my God, it is very hard that little should be taken from us."

At which point the poor gentleman's voice broke; and, as the firelight shone on his face, George could see the big tears coursing one another down his cheeks.

"I must get Matilda married," he at length resumed, "and then decide on some future course. If it was n't for the girls, I should not care. I could bear it if it was only myself," and he seized the papers with trembling hands, and began examining the items once again eagerly.

"If one knew what the calls would amount to," said George, merely by way of saying something.

"But we do not; and if we did, it could not make any difference to me," answered Mr. Molozane. "No I must get Tilly married, and then think — decide on what it will be best to do."

Was he wondering whether another daughter might marry, and enable him to keep the Dower House, George Geith marvelled. In a moment the accountant ran over a list of possibilities, a proposal, an acceptance, an arrangement of Mr. Molozane's affairs, a grant of the Dower House to that gentleman for life.

Could he blame the father and daughter if his ideas turned out to be correct? Could he say Beryl was wrong, or Mr. Molozane, or any one? Could he even, although he loved the girl himself, wish her to do otherwise? for what could he give her beyond a small competence? How could he help either her father or Louise? Wherein was he superior to Mr. Wern, who could place Beryl high above all chance of want, who could make her mistress of the Molozanes' old property, who could smooth every after-hour of her father's life, and give the girl herself wealth, position, comfort?

Could he blame her? With the death-bells of his own happiness tolling in his ears, George Geith felt he could not; that it would be strange if Beryl did not marry Mr. Wern; and that the man who stepped in and tried to prevent her doing so, would have much to answer for, if he succeeded in his endeavor.

Looking alternately into the fire, and at the stricken creature who sat gazing hopelessly at the blaze, the accountant resolved to forget his own dreams, and to resign himself to a future which he believed inevitable.

From the days of Jephtha had not daughters been sacrificed for their parents? and should not the practice be followed at Molozane Park? Further, was it a sacrifice? If there were not much love, was there not an infinite quantity of respect? Did she care for any one else? Could not Mr. Wern give her everything for which the heart of woman longs? Would not twelve months transform Miss Beryl Molozane into a very contented and charming Mrs. Wern? and if so, why not? Let them marry and be happy, what did it signify to him? Which rational questions he put to his own heart just as Mr. Molozane suggested that coffee was most probably ready.

"And, remember, Mr. Geith, I do not want the girls to know anything of this," he said. "It will be time enough for them to learn the worst when the crash comes."

In an instant George was out at sea again. If temporal

salvation lay in Mr. Wern's hands, why should Beryl not be taught to understand that such was the case, and instructed to play her cards accordingly? Or was it all acting?

For which suspicion the accountant hated himself next moment; hating himself still more when he looked at Beryl's guileless face, which was thinner than formerly, and paler, as he thought, too.

"You have brought bad news," she said to Mr. Geith, seizing a moment when it was possible to speak without being overheard.

"I have brought no news of any kind," he answered.

"You have brought then a confirmation of my fears,—  
- the Park must go."

"I can't tell at all what Mr. Molozane may do."

"You treat me like a child — like a baby — like an idiot,"  
she said impatiently, and left him in a pet.

Next morning, however, before his departure, she was at his side again, coaxing, entreating to be told exactly how matters stood.

"I shall hate you if you refuse," was the last shot she fired.

"Pray do not do that," he answered, sadly. "At any rate, let us part friends, for it is just possible I may never see you again."

"Never see us again? Where are you going? To China — India — New Zealand?"

"No; I shall still be in London, but my work here is finished; and though I shall never forget the Dower House, it is likely that I shall never have to visit it more."

"Why not?" asked Beryl. "Do you never go to see any one except on business?"

"Very rarely."

"And do you mean to say you would not come to see us?"

"I should like to come," he said, with a not unnatural hesitation; "but I should not like to intrude."

“Intrude! nonsense!” exclaimed the young lady; “I know papa was going to ask you to be present at Tilly’s marriage. He will want some Christian to talk to after it, unless Granny sends him out of his mind between this and that. I think I never did detest Granny so much as while she was here last; I had a bonfire when she left. Will you come to the wedding, Mr. Geith?”

“If I may — if I am asked.”

“If you are asked,” she repeated with a pout; “as if you were likely not to be asked. It is to be early in the year. Dick was of age a fortnight since, and Granny wanted the marriage to take place immediately; but papa said he should like us to spend one more Christmas together before she went.”

Whereupon George began to wonder whether he should be invited to spend his Christmas at the Dower House, or whether he should have to pass it as best he could, in Fen Court. Of Christmas at Holloway he had already had sufficient, and more than sufficient, but Christmas at the Dower House! If they would but ask him, the invitation would make him happy through all the dull days of November, through all the dark, dreary days of December. Was it likely Mr. Molozane would say anything on the subject before he went away? or would he wait till nearer the time, and then write? Or would he never think about him at all?

“How I wish I knew for certain,” thought the accountant; and the idea kept him in a fever all the time he was in the house — all the way to St. Margaret’s, to which place Mr. Molozane accompanied him, and up almost to the moment the train was due at that place.

“I intend,” was the last sentence of his host’s, which George Geith subsequently remembered, “to put this matter totally aside for the present. Sufficient for the day — you know, Mr. Geith — and I fancy when my trouble does come, it will prove sufficient for me. Meantime, I will not make

the present wretched, by looking forward into the future. I would like to spend one more happy Christmas in the old place; and if you have no better engagement, or if no better engagement should present itself to you, I hope you will join the party. We have not much to offer besides welcome, but it is at your service."

What the accountant said in reply, it would be difficult for me to put on paper. He only knew himself afterwards that he had accepted the invitation, and that the train which bore him back to London at the funeral pace which trains on the Eastern Counties line at that time effected, seemed to him a fairy car floating far above all sublunary cares and projects. The man was hopelessly, senselessly, if you will, in love; and the idea that Beryl was not lost to him, that Beryl liked him, that Beryl's father wished to have him staying in his house, transported him into the seventh heaven of happiness, and sent him back to town to work with redoubled vigor; to give a far more capricious and uncomfortable god, the Mammon before whom, but for his acquaintance with Beryl Moloch, he would still have been grovelling in the dust.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## CHRISTMAS EVE.

IN the year of grace of which I am writing, Christmas came to every home in Britain in the garb which all Christians, if they were properly minded, would do so for the gratification of Englishmen and Englishwomen, crowned with holly; from amidst the polished leaves whereof shone scarlet berries, arrayed in frosted snow, which glittered and glistened in the light of the winter's sun; with icicles for his jewels; with white and glorious robes of state, Christmas, surrounded by his minstrels and singers, by his bards and story-tellers, by fair girls and happy children, by gray-beards and stalwart men and smiling women, came sweeping through the city streets, along country lanes, flinging largess as he travelled, alms to the poor, rest to the weary, mirth to the young, contentment to the old, comfort to the broken-hearted, hope to the desponding. "In remembrance," Christmas fed the hungry, clothed the naked, sheltered the homeless, visited the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and beautified with his beneficent hand, care-worn and suffering faces. Free from earthly mists, with the glories of his radiant apparel, undimmed by rain, unobscured by gloom, Christmas arrived, bringing with it enchantment to George Geith.

For weeks he had been working hard; early and late had been battling with balance sheets, schedules, ledger journals, cash-books, and day-books, battling and winning. He had earned his rest. Even he acknowledged he deserved his holiday as he locked his drawers, shut down his ~~dom~~



closed his safe, and began making his preparations for departure.

Leisure earned is sweeter by far than leisure given, or leisure stolen ; and the accountant, weary though he might be, felt triumphantly, that, so far as his worldly occupation went, he had not left a thing undone which he ought to have done ; and that no memories of work neglected, of clients dissatisfied, would disturb the holiday which he was about to enjoy.

Walking through the city streets, he seemed as though treading on air ; he could have greeted every man he met like a brother ; he entertained no contempt for the groups who were holding endless arguments as to what it would be best for them to buy for the morrow's dinner. There was a beauty to him in the prize meat, in the laurels and hollies that decorated the butchers' shops, in the decorations of the grocers' windows, in the long lines of turkeys, in the party-colored ribbons that were tied round the necks of sucking-pigs ; there was a life in the scene he had never noticed before, a meaning in the merriment and excitement that pervades the streets of London on a Christmas Eve he had never previously guessed.

During all the years he had passed in London, his mind had been like a broken instrument, out of tune and out of tone ; and the consequence was, that no kind of human melody had been able to extract any answer from it, save silence, or at best a cracked and discordant response.

But now the strings were replaced ; and almost any hand that swept the chords was able to draw harmony out of them. Even Christmas, which had heretofore been a fast, which he should have liked to keep as a feast, seemed to him then the happiest day in all the year ; and he could glance at the Christmas pictures, and read the advertisements of the Christmas stories without a sneer.

What a beauty he found likewise in the white country roads ; what refreshment in the cold, crisp air ; what quiet-

ness in the eyes of the bright shining stars ; what exquisite loveliness in the laurels laden with frosted snow, in the great black trees whose branches were half-clothed with white. How picturesque Wattisbridge Church looked as he passed it by, lighted up, doubtless, for the finishing touches to be put to the decorations for the morrow ; what a Christmas look the earth wore ; what a happiness it was not to have to spend that evening and the morrow in lonely offices in town.

George was so wrapt up in bliss, that he had not sense enough left to whisper to himself that Beryl was the cause of the beauty, the refreshment, the quietness, the loveliness, the picturesqueness, the happiness. Doubtless many philosophical men would have analyzed the enjoyment as though it had contained poison, would have taken away this ingredient and that, would have exhausted, evaporated everything save Beryl, and found that all else were mere accessories, that without Beryl all was barren ; many might have done this, I say, but not George Geith. He was neither philosophical nor chimerical as he crossed the threshold of the Dower House, and was greeted by Beryl in the hall.

"The horrid old woman is here," she said, with a comical grimace ; "you will find a room-full, such as they are ; when we had one affliction we thought we might as well have more, and they all look as if they were weary of their lives ; and I am sure," she added, executing a *pas seul* on the door-mat, "I am weary of mine."

"Who is wearying you ?" inquired George.

"Everybody ; the drawing-room is a perfect Noah's ark filled with — you know what. Granny, and Dick, and Mr. Elsenham, Rev. Mr. Grey and his mammy, Rev. Mr. Green and his sister, Mr. Finch and ditto, Mr. Wern and his niece, Mr. Hastie and his wife, Mr. Brandron and his daughter, Mrs. Ponder and hers ; and there is not a dancing school amongst them ; and we have been conversing rationally and making ourselves agreeable to Granny."

"You surely do not mean that you have been attempting anything of the kind !" said George.

"I do; I laid myself out to see whether I could not annoy Granny more by making myself pleasant than by making myself disagreeable, and I have succeeded to perfection. I have picked up her handkerchief, and handed her fan, and given her footstools, and got pillows for her back, and attended to her general comfort till I knew she was ready to swear. And can't she swear; oh! Mr. Geith, you should hear her to her maid; I would not be the maid for ten thousand pounds, for I should kill Granny, I know I should. I have seen her box her ears for sticking a comb in wrongly. But now I must go to the horrors; you remember your old room, do you not? I am so glad you have come." And with that Beryl vanished, leaving George Geith standing in a perfect flood of sunshine, steeped to the ears in happiness.

Beryl had included Mr. Wern amongst the bores! Poor Mr. Wern! rich George Geith! to have such amazing confidences poured into his ears; to hear Beryl was glad to see him; to have such a home as this to come to! George verily believed he had entered Paradise, and he lingered a minute or two longer than he had need to have done over his dressing, just to make sure that he was not dreaming, that this happy Christmas eve was not all an illusion.

He had seen most of the people mentioned by Beryl on the occasion of previous visits, so that when he at last descended the stairs and entered the drawing-room, he did not feel like a man flung head foremost into a den of lions. He knew most of the gentlemen to speak to, and some of the ladies as well; and though Mrs. Elsenham evidently regarded his presence as an intrusion, she was the only person in the apartment who did not, after his or her best fashion, try to make the stranger welcome.

As for old Mr. Elsenham, who sat in a great easy-chair by the fire, he was rapturous if not maundering in his greeting. "How is my good friend?" he inquired, getting upon his lean legs as he spoke, and mumbling out the words as well as want of teeth would permit him. "How did you

leave the city? he! he! Grand sight in the city on Christmas eve. Have n't seen the shops dressed this ten years. Sit down, sit down." And with shaking hands he forced the accountant into a chair beside him, and began rambling and chattering about the days, "when he was young and very different; when he liked the frost and the snow and the keen north wind. But I prefer the fire now, you see," he added, with a weak laugh; "I can't get too near the heat; I'm old — I'm getting old."

"I intend you to dance Sir Roger de Coverley to-night, at any rate," said Beryl, leaning over the back of his chair. "I will have you for my partner; so remember, sir, you are engaged, and do not desert me for any one else, or I shall be very angry indeed."

"It is you that desert me, Miss Flirt," he protested. "You know you promised to marry me ten years ago, and you have never done so yet."

"But I will," answered Beryl, "if I can satisfy myself that it is lawful to marry one's grandfather's brother. I shall expect real settlement though, and lots of pin-money!"

"What a mercenary child it is; only listen to her!" ~~tit-~~tered the octogenarian.

"I am only telling you what I shall expect, so that there may be no misapprehension afterwards," observed Beryl and at this statement Mr. Elsenham laughed till he shed imbecile tears; which laughter so moved Mrs. Elsenham's indignation that she called Beryl over to her, and remarked

"If you do not behave yourself with greater decorum, shall speak to your papa."

"Gracious, grandma! you do not mean it, surely?" said that incorrigible young lady. "What should you say to him?"

"I should tell him you were flirting to a disgraceful extent with that Mr. Geith."

"It is of no use, grandma," said Beryl, solemnly. "Papa would not believe it. He knows I never flirt."

"Your manners are forward and unfeminine."

"Some people like them," retorted her grand-daughter.

"I shall certainly mention the matter to your papa!" exclaimed Mrs. Elsenham.

"I will go and tell him you want him," said Beryl, meekly; and almost immediately afterwards she reappeared with Mr. Molozane, who asked his mother-in-law what he could do for her.

"I want you to put a stop to the disgraceful flirtation Beryl is carrying on with that man," said Mrs. Elsenham, from the corner of a sofa which she occupied in solitary state.

"On my word, papa," broke in Beryl, "I have not been flirting with anybody, nor speaking a sentence to a soul except to Mr. Elsenham. He wanted me to marry him, and I said I would do so at once if I could only make sure he was not within the prohibited degrees."

"Considering Mr. Wern is here," resumed Mrs. Elsenham, "it seems to me imprudent in the extreme. I do not know what you may think, Ambrose, but I feel sure Beryl will, to use a common expression, spoil her market."

"Do you really believe, then, Mr. Wern was going to bid for me?" asked Beryl.

"I really believe, miss, that if you could behave yourself with ordinary propriety, he would propose at once."

"And then I should have a larger house than you, grandma; and only think, perhaps six horses to my carriage!" exclaimed Beryl, rapturously. With which conciliating speech the young lady retired from the discussion, and repaired to the piano, where her sister was singing her sweetest and saddest.

"You are a perfect swan," whispered Beryl; "do, like a good dear Tilly, play something lively, and see if we cannot set these stupid owls to dance. I am sick and tired of trying to talk to them, we have exhausted every subject of conversation I can think of; try a waltz, gallop, anything;" and

thus exhorted, Miss Molozane's white fingers began rattling out.

"I never hear that," said Beryl to Mr. Wern, beside whom she chanced at the moment to find herself, "without thinking of the commencement of a story I once read; it began, — 'Strauss was playing one of his most brilliant waltzes;' what happened after that I forget; whether anybody was happy or miserable I have not an idea; I only know Strauss was playing, and that there was a grand Italian ball-room, and terraces bordered with flowers, and statues and draperies, and all sorts of pretty things."

"You are very fond of dancing and gayety," he said, inquiringly.

"To be sure I am; if I was a grand lady, I think I should be at a party every night of my life."

"I can't think you would care to lead such a butterfly existence."

"Indeed I should; I can fancy nothing pleasanter than to live in the sunshine and to die in the shade;" and Beryl was off again, entreating this person and that to say she or he liked dancing, if only a quadrille.

"For, I declare," added the young lady, "I must dance to-night, if only a minuet, with Mr. Elsenham."

"It would be very shabby if we were to leave you in the lurch like that, Miss Beryl," said Mr. Finch. "I can only say I'll do my best to prevent you having to perform alone."

"Really, Mr. Finch, you are a treasure," said Beryl, gratefully.

"And what am I?" asked Dick Elsenham; "I'll dance with half a dozen of them, if you like."

Thus Beryl got the party at last into motion; and I think, as a whole, when the evening was over, no one had any cause to regret that her exertions had been crowned with success. "Dance!" observed Mr. Richard Elsenham to Mr. Wern, — "if you believe me, she'd dance till her eye-

brows dropped off. Supposing she could have her own way, would n't she go a pace?"

Upon which comforting assurance, Mr. Wern slept that night uneasily.

"I believe I have dragged that wheel," thought Dick, complacently; and he was so well satisfied with the effect he had produced that he danced with all the ugly partners Beryl implored him to select, and endeavored to induce his grandmother to trip a measure with her brother-in-law.

Which suggestion proving too much for Beryl's sense of the ridiculous, she had to leave the room, just as Mr. Elsenham got upon his poor old legs and gallantly offered to lead the lady to her place, an offer she indignantly declined.

"My dancing days are over," she said, drawing a lace shawl around her ample shoulders; "and if you want my opinion, I should say yours are over too."

"Never mind, uncle, I'll be your partner," cried Louise, in a high treble; "and I, and I, and I," exclaimed half a dozen girls, whom George Geith liked for their hearty frankness.

"No, indeed, Miss Loo," broke in Beryl at this juncture, reëntering the room; "uncle belongs to me; do you not, uncle? and he shall dance with nobody else."

"Unhappy man!" remarked Louise; but the observation was lost on her sister, who had Mr. Elsenham already in his place, and who looked as pleased as though she had just carried off a prize.

"Why have n't you got a mistletoe, Beryl?" asked her partner in a pause in the dance. And the question wherewith he went maundering off to bed, led thither by his servant, was, "Why have n't you got a mistletoe, Beryl? You could have got a good branch for half-a-crown at the green-grocer's in the next street."

"Poor uncle!" said Beryl, "he thinks he is living his old city-life over again. Only imagine, Mr. Geith, what countless years must have passed since he was young. I hope —

I hope — I pray," she added, almost passionately, "I shall never live to be like that, to be taken off to bed by a servant, and to be old, and foolish, and feeble, and doting. How much thinner he is; his legs are just like knitting-needles are not they?"

What, in the name of all that's wonderful, was any wise individual to say to such a girl? Passion and ridicule, pity and amusement in the same breath! Each time he saw her George Geith thought Beryl Molozone a greater puzzle whether she was strong or weak, wise or frivolous, perfectly straightforward or a little false, the accountant could not decide. He only knew one thing for certain, viz., that whatever she might be, he loved her; and that for weal or for woe, in joy or in sorrow, he should still go on loving the girl forever.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

## DOMESTIC PERPLEXITIES.

Our pleasures travel by express; our pains by parliamentary. Through the loveliest scenes the joy train of our lives rushes swiftly; at the pretty wayside stations we are able but to touch hands with cherished friends, and behold! we are off again; but if we have grief for our engine-driver, care for the stoker, how we creep along the lines, how we tarry in the rain; what leisure we have for surveying swampy ground, turnip-fields soaking with wet; stations filled with steam and smoke, and snorting, puffing engines; what a length the weary journey seems; what an unendurable companion the trouble we are compelled to travel with proves.

Was there ever a long happy day, I wonder, even though it fell at midsummer? Did not the sun hurry on his way, and set at noon, just as the tide of our happiness was rising highest? Are not twelve hours of bliss distilled into minutes? and when the moment of parting comes, does it not seem as though we had but that instant clasped hands in joyous greeting?

With George Geith this was the case, at any rate. Christmas eve and Christmas day were gone almost before they came; and as he drove over to St. Margaret's, in the gray light of a winter's morning, he cursed time's rapid flight, and wished that at the Dower House he could pluck all the feathers from its wings. Still, though the happiness was gone, he could look back on it with unutterable satisfaction.

He had been on the enchanted island ; and when tossing in the midst of the ocean, he could recall its beauties.

Though away from the sunshine, he could remember its brightness ; and, amidst all the din and turmoil of his business life, he could still find leisure to think of the Dower House, and the happy quiet hours he had spent there.

Sometimes whilst waiting in another man's office, sometimes in the loneliness of his own home, whilst walking through the crowded streets, and again when sitting silent in omnibus or train, George Geith's thoughts hurried eagerly back to the little green spot in the way he had travelled, and rested there. That the memory of it kept him awake at night, I cannot say ; but I do know he thought of the Dower House last thing before he closed his eyes, and sometimes in his rare dreams revisited it.

And in sleep fancy played some strange tricks with the accountant. Once he dreamt he was living at the Park, and Mr. Molozane was offering Beryl to him ; and again, he was poor and Beryl was telling him not to mind, for she had plenty, and she loved him. He was a clergyman once more, and had come all the way from Morelands to Wattisbridge to marry Cissy Hayles to his cousin Sir Mark ; but when the bride arrived, she proved to be Beryl Molozane, who left Sir Mark, and declared she would have no one but George.

In his dreams he was an actor in scenes which he could never have imagined when awake ; and by degrees those scenes grew real to him ; and George Geith, sober man of business though he was, came to believe that these visions might some day prove realities.

For clearly Beryl did not care for Mr. Wern ; and though it could never follow that, because she did not care for him, she did care for George Geith, still hope whispered flatteringly in the accountant's ear that the girl might grow to love him as he loved her.

Day by day he mentally revisited the Dower House, thought over the hours he had spent there, and recalled his

visit, the pleasantest and happiest of all; the walk across the bridge with Mr. Molozane and Beryl; the sermon from the family pew; the old church wreathed and decked with holly and evergreens; the gathering of friends and acquaintances in the porch; the comical expression on the face of the old woman, as her grandmother's carriage drove off with a crash and a rattle; her little aside of "What a box you will take and be Tilly, to have to be boxed up in that carriage with Granny;" the kindness, not to say affection, of Mr. Molozane's manner — a kindness far exceeding any he had ever evinced towards Mr. Richard Elsenham; the pleasant evening, which was all the more pleasant for some inscrutable reason, Mrs. Elsenham elected to spend in her dressing-room, possibly because, as Beryl had hinted, she had found the Christmas wine very pleasant; the gayety, the laughter, the fun, the abandon, the cheerfulness of that family party: all these things were enjoyed with George Geith, and rendered his existence a more pleasant one to what it was when my readers first made his acquaintance.

The Dower House was not closed to him. When he had finished his business there, he was not bowed to the doors, but sent out into the world a stranger. Rather the doors were open to him, and as a friend he could enter them more freely than as an accountant he might ever have done.

Mr. Molozane told Mr. Molozane how isolated he was; how, without wife, mother, sister, or friend, he lived in the midst of a great city, and battled for his daily bread; and then he gave him an invitation to visit the Dower House whenever he could conveniently manage to do so.

"If the Dower House is mine, I shall always be glad to have you here," finished Mr. Molozane; and I suppose it is unnecessary for me to add that George Geith said he would always be glad to visit the speaker.

At this time, it may be asked whether Mr. Molozane suspected that George cared for his second daughter. If he

did, there can be no question about his desire that Beryl likewise should care for George, or he never would have thrown them together as he did. Like many another father, it is just possible that he looked upon Beryl's marriage as remoter; that in consequence of looking afar off, he could not see what was just under his eyes; but it is more probable that vaguely and dimly he desired to have a strong, sensible, self-reliant man for his son-in-law; a man after his own heart; a man whom he liked, whom he had found out for himself, who would make his favorite child a good husband.

With regard to Mr. Wern, there could be no doubt but that Mr. Molozane saw he desired to marry Beryl; and there was equally no doubt but that, whilst the father remained neutral, it was not a connection he desired. Before marriage, men are not so adaptable as women: they see something in the individual who comes a-wooing besides his face and his fortune; and, strange though it may sound, the personal likings and dislikings of the males of a woman's family towards one of their own sex, who desires to become one of them, are usually much stronger than that of the female portion of the little community. After marriage, male relations reconcile themselves to the inevitable with a philosophy undreamed of by mothers and sisters; but beforehand, they have their little predilections, and are as much prejudiced against this suitor, and as much in favor of that, as women are reputed to be.

It was thus, at any rate, with Mr. Molozane. He had his pet prejudices — his especial fancies — and he did not like Mr. Wern. He respected him certainly, but no amount of respect will fill the smallest measure of love; not that Mr. Wern had any faults, unless being too good, too calm, could be called heinous sins; but, simply, Mr. Molozane did not like him; and though Beryl might marry the rich man she chose, and keep the Park in the family, and place herself high and dry above the sea of want, still Mr. Molozane would not aid in bringing about such a result.

Undeniably, he should be glad to see Beryl well provided ; the mistress of a large establishment, removed forever from all chances of poverty, all necessity for close economy ; but he felt that if Beryl married a man for whom he did not take much care, she would be somehow less his daughter ; and if no choice could be given him, he would prefer that her future place of residence should not be Molozane Park.

He and his had lost it. Let it go. He would rather let it go than that it should be recovered by his daughter.

It was easier to a man of his temperament to lose a kingdom and depart into exile than thus to abdicate. If Beryl were to marry Mr. Wern, well and good. Meanwhile he had asked Mr. Geith, and asked him to his house.

As for Beryl, what with her housekeeping, the preparations for her sister's marriage, and the constant worry of her grandfather's presence, she had enough to do during the weeks following George Geith's visit without troubling her little head about lovers at all.

"The puddings alone were," as she informed her sister, "enough to turn any person's hair gray ;" and when it was considered that Mrs. Elsenham was good enough to criticize every dish which came to table, and to inquire what had been provided for her servants' dinners, Beryl's trouble will not be considered imaginary.

"When Granny is not here, I could declare there are plenty different kinds of meats ; but when she is here, they are reduced to beef and mutton."

"Mutton again !" went on Beryl ; and at this point she made a loop in her chain and looked at imaginary dishes through this imaginary eye-glass ; "mutton again ; I really wonder, Beryl, you are not ashamed to meet a sheep ! as if I could make new beasts to kill for her, the old epicure ! I wonder which I hate most, her eye-glass or her spectacles," succeeded the young lady ; "the eye-glass makes me shudder, but the spectacles make me long to do something desperate."

The way she balances them on her fat forefinger when she is lecturing me, drives me crazy. I wish she would break them, I do, and then she could not read to Mr. Elsenham. Poor man! I am often sorry for him."

"But cannot you somehow manage more variety?" asked Miss Molozane, turning her fine eyes on her sister, who answered, —

"If you tell me, Tilly, how to do it, I shall be greatly obliged to you. To have to feed this garrison with our means is no light matter, without having to serve a table every day fit for a lord. If I could have 'the fish in the lake and the deer in the vale' from Molozane Park; if in this desert I could have the flesh-pots of Egypt, and get something to change the manna and quails' diet, it would be different; but as it is, I must make the best of it. Would not Granny have made Moses weary of his life? would not she have entreated for the quails, and grumbled at them afterwards? I wonder if, when I am old, I shall care for what I eat and drink, and be greedy, and make myself disagreeable like Granny. I would not be in your shoes, Tilly, for any money you could offer me."

"Why cannot you have fish and fruit, and game and vegetables from the Park?" asked Miss Molozane, ignoring the latter part of her sister's sentence. "You know Mr. Wern would be only too glad to send everything he has down here."

"I know he would, but papa does not like it. He does not choose to have anybody's fish, flesh, and fowl coming here without paying for it; and he is quite right. We are not paupers yet, Miss Matilda."

"You ought to marry Mr. Wern, and then these things would belong to you of right," said the beauty.

"If ever I do marry Mr. Wern, there is one thing you may be sure of," retorted Beryl, sharply, "that Granny shall never enter the Park gates." From which speech it will be seen that the idea of marrying Mr. Wern had entered the child's head and was entertained by her.

"Bless me!" exclaimed Miss Molozane; and that young lady proceeded with her dressing.

"I think if ever I do marry Mr. Wern," continued her sister, brushing her hair vehemently as she spoke, "I shall marry him to spite Granny. I know nothing on earth would annoy her so much as to think I was richer than she; and that good man is twice as rich. What a thing it is, Tilly, to consider what lots of money some people have!" And at this point Beryl sighed and looked over the Park, on which the snow was lying thick.

"I wish we had some of it," remarked Miss Molozane. "I wish Mr. Elsenham would leave us his fortune when he dies."

"I wish he would give it to us now," said Beryl. "He cannot enjoy it all, and he would miss nothing but the good books Granny reads to him; and if he likes them, which I do not believe, I am sure any curate would give him a couple of hours a day for fifty pounds a year. Any person like Mr. Elsenham, who has not a house, who gives no employment, who spends only about a tenth of his income, and lets the remainder accumulate, ought to be compelled to provide for young people like ourselves, who really could enjoy money."

"I suppose grandmamma will have it all," remarked Miss Molozane.

"Or Dick," answered her sister. "For your sake, I hope, Dick; for I must say I wish he had some fortune of his own. I should not like to be dependent on Granny for every morsel of bread I eat; and Granny will live until the millennium. Mark my words, Tilly, and see if she does not!"

But at this point Miss Molozane thought it best to change the conversation. Beryl had such a disagreeable knack of turning the worst side of her intended marriage out, of showing the excessive dearness of her bargain, that the beauty declined entering upon the subject whenever it was possible

for her to avoid it; wherefore, on the present occasion, instead of replying to Beryl's remark, she commenced wondering when "papa would be back."

"Certainly to-morrow, I should say," promptly replied her sister, "or he never would have told Robert to take over the horses to Hatfield. What a long ride he will have of it, to be sure! Had I been in his place, I should rather have gone into town, and come back by train to St. Margaret's."

"He can't endure London," was all the remark Miss Molozane made.

"I wish Jane was better," groaned Beryl, reverting to housekeeping troubles. "It is so awkward having, as I may say, only one servant, and Robert away, and that fine lady and gentleman of Granny's to be waited on and cooked for; if it were not for Louey, I don't know how I should do at all."

"Can you not get help from the village?"

"By paying, Tilly, by paying; and I have to consider every sixpence. I cannot worry papa for money, I cannot, cannot, cannot do it;" and Beryl's cheeks grew red as she said this.

"I had a few sovereigns of my own," she resumed, "and they are gone, and Louey broke open her box and gave me all she had, thirty-five shillings, and that is gone, all gone, to give that old woman, who might just as well be at Withebridge Inn, dainties and tidbits! It is no wonder I hate her."

"Oh! Beryl, I am so sorry," broke out the beauty. "If you had only asked me yesterday, I could have given you ten pounds, but I have spent it. I had no idea you and Louey were using your own money, or I would have given it to you."

"I would not have had it," returned Beryl, snappishly, "for you get it from Granny, and I will not have her money; only remember this, Tilly, that, if you are going to be married at all, the sooner you are married and out of this, the better I shall be pleased."



With which gracious speech, Miss Beryl, whose temper had been that day tried beyond its power of endurance, founced out of the room to see that domestic matters were progressing to her satisfaction.

It was a wretched afternoon; the snow was lying thick on the roads, and the sky was dull and leaden and heavy. No walking could be had, though Beryl felt, if she could but get out for an hour, she might calm down her irritation, and be better for the task of entertaining her grandmother and Mr. Elsenham through the interminable evening. Dick was dressing to go out for dinner, and Beryl wished she was going too — "Or rather I wish," she corrected herself, "they were all going, and I to stay at home;" in default of which desire being gratified, she commenced roaming about the house, seeking rest and finding none.

Because, wherever she went she encountered her grandmother, or something connected with her grandmother; met either that lady marching about holding herself like a soldier on parade, or the lady's-maid in the passages, or Mr. Elsenham's man on the staircase.

Finally, although the library was littered with various inferior articles belonging to the trousseau on which the Withefell dressmaker was spending her best skill, Beryl took up her position there, and sat looking out at the terrace, where they had all passed so many merry hours during the previous summer, till the afternoon darkened into twilight, and twilight deepened into night.

With candles came Mrs. Elsenham to inspect the needlewoman's progress through her eye-glass; and from her distant chair, Beryl, whose vision was perfect, watched the proceedings, saw Mrs. Elsenham's stately airs of patronage, her wonder-smile of approbation, and heard the dressmaker's "wo-ma'am, ma'am, ma'am, repeated, till she could have anathematized the creature for her obsequiousness.

The town-lady's one great aim was to impress the provincial sempstress with the honor she was conferring upon

her by suffering the future Mrs. Elsenham's apparel to be made by any but a person living at the West End. One might have thought, to hear her, that a handkerchief could not be properly hemmed except within a given distance of the parks; and that it was impossible for stitching to be passable a mile from Piccadilly. Nevertheless, Mrs. Elsenham was pleased finally to observe the work was very creditable, and the making "beautiful." "I must really show it to Gibbs," said Mrs. Elsenham, referring to her maid, and actually ignoring the fact that her maid had seen the work and reported upon its quality to her mistress. With this gracious speech, Beryl's grandmother left the apartment, leaving a general effect of trailing black satin and sweeping black velvet behind her.

"What nonsense it all is," remarked Beryl, coming to the table and tossing over the laces and cambrics with no tender hands. "The only good I can see in it, Miss Sparks, is that it has kept your fingers out of mischief, and will put money in your pocket. As for me, if ever I marry — if ever! — I'll walk to church in a cotton morning-gown and straw bonnet."

"Law, Miss Beryl, how you do talk, to be sure; what would any gentleman say to a lady dressed like that?"

"I am quite unable to tell you what he would say," answered Beryl, laughing; "I can only tell you what I would do. Supposing, now, I was engaged to-day, I should like to be married to-morrow; and have none of this fuss, and trouble, and worry, and expense."

"Well, it is an expense, miss, to be sure," agreed the complaisant Miss Sparks; "but then, it is a thing that mostly comes only once in a lifetime."

"It does not come once to some people," Beryl was just about to remark, when she luckily remembered that Miss Sparks had arrived at an age when her chance of changing her name was small; for which reason the young lady altered her sentence into — "Once is often enough; and

all this trouble, it is, in my opinion, once too  
as your own, Miss Beryl, you would think differ-

as I might," was the reply; "but, at any rate, that  
think now;" and with this cheerful speech, Beryl  
out of the room, to plunge into domestic troubles  
to help as best she might to preserve order almost  
st of chaos.

ext time, Jane, that you upset a kettle of scalding  
yourself when Granny is here," she remarked to  
who was laid up in consequence of having per-  
t feat, "I really shall be cross. As if you could  
hosen some better opportunity;" and thus scold-  
nursed the woman and saw to her wants.

like to see you nursing about, miss," pleaded  
r. "If I do need anything, Ann could come to  
id then."

as trouble enough of her own about the dinner,  
ending to you," said Beryl, as she poured the  
out a cup of tea. "And now, don't fret, but  
and get well, Jane; that is the wisest thing  
y."

rich philosophical remark, the young lady settled  
down for a sleep, first assuring her that she had  
pastry herself; "so I know it will be good, and  
ill eat till she makes herself ill; and then she  
boxes of blue pills to make herself worse."

the eating was concerned, Beryl proved a true  
or Mrs. Elsenham did full justice to the tarts.

re you," she said to Beryl, "I would take Ann  
and get rid of Jane altogether. Ann can send  
etter dinner than Jane. That crust was deli-  
id Mrs. Elsenham was graciously pleased, on the  
this assertion, to take another glass of port, a  
rticularly affected.

Whether it was the port, or the pastry, or the entrées, Beryl did not know; but never before had her grandmother been so gracious to her as on this especial evening. She even asked Beryl to sing; and was so kind as to remark — waking up from a nap, be it observed — “that, although her voice had no power, or variety, or flexibility, it was still sweet, a soothing voice,” finished Mrs. Elsenham; whereupon her brother-in-law, jumping up from a distant sofa, added, “Yes, that is precisely it, Maria; you have hit it exactly; Beryl’s singing always sends me to sleep.”

“So that I am of some use in the world, if only as a sedative,” replied Beryl; adding, in a lower voice, to her sister, “just as Granny is an irritant.”

“Sing something else,” said the commander-in-chief.

“Yes, do, Beryl. Sing ‘I remember,’” echoed Mr. Elsenham; and, in his cracked old voice, he hummed with her —

“I remember, I remember, how my childhood fled by;  
All the snows of the December, all the warmth of the July,”

till he had to break off, coughing violently; which brought down a scolding from Mrs. Elsenham, who assured him he ought to know better than to attempt to sing anything.

“It is all very well for young people,” added his ample relative; “but it does not do for persons of our age to try to pass for nightingales.”

“Goodness, grandmamma, did you ever try to pass for one?” asked Beryl, facing round on the music-stool to put the question.

“Don’t be pert, miss,” was all the satisfaction she got from Mrs. Elsenham; whilst the idea so tickled Mr. Elsenham, that he laughed till he coughed again, for which result Beryl, as it was her fault, came in for a lecture.

Nevertheless the evening passed off, on the whole, tranquilly; and the whole party sat up so late, that, when Mr. Richard Elsenham returned home — as usual, not too sober — he found the whole farm-yard, as he phrased it, still astir.

"Don't move," he said, forcing Beryl back into her place. "Shing for — me — nothing out of your con—foun—ded operas, but shomething jolly. We 'll shing Buffalo gals together. Matilda, you keep away; we don't want you; do we, Beryl?"

"Richard, I am ashamed of you," said Mrs. Elsenham, severely.

"Why," he asked, steadying himself against the piano.

"To see you come home in such a disgraceful condition! Go to bed at once!"

"That is what you do, old lady, I suppose," he retorted; and to cut short the controversy, which would soon have become a quarrel, Beryl was forced to interpose, and escort her cousin to the door, where he turned, and with drunken gravity assured all whom it might concern, that "Beryl was a tramp, that he loved her, and that his grandmother was a tough old hen."

After this, Mrs. Elsenham thought it time to separate for the night.

"I second that proposal," said Beryl, with a yawn.

"So do I, if it is of any use," added Louise.

"Bless my heart, I thought I was in bed," exclaimed Mr. Elsenham, rubbing his eyes. "I am very glad to be awake, though," he went on. "I dreamt I was a clerk again at Martin's, and could not get my columns to agree, and he was nagging about the office just as he used to do. Thank you, my dear;" and the old man, putting one hand on Beryl's shoulder, shambled up the staircase, rambling on about Martin's and his balance, and how glad he was to wake, till his servant took him in charge, and left Beryl free to go to her own room.

"What in the world is the matter," asked Louise, as her sister broke out crying — crying almost hysterically.

"I am tired, Loo; and I am worried; and hearing that old man talking about his young days, and thanking God that he had waked to find himself the feeble, purposeless, decrepid

creature he is, poured the last drop in my cup. I know am exposing myself badly, Loo, but you will understand what I mean."

Which Miss Loo proved she did, by at once, after the fashion of young authors, sitting down, and putting the whole affair into poetry.

"Do not ask me to listen to it," said Beryl, sleepily. "Your notions could not be like mine; and, at any rate, I have cried as much as I want to cry; so good night, and do make haste into bed, and put out the candle," — injunctions Louise obeyed after she had re-read her poem lovingly, and erased here, and added there.

"You really have torn yourself away from it at last," remarked Beryl, looking at her sister with half-closed eyes; and then she went fairly off into a sound sleep, from which, about three o'clock the next morning, she was awakened by a violent shake, and an awful apparition in an elaborate night-dress and flannel dressing-gown, saying to her, in a voice thick with fat and excitement, "Get up, Beryl! get up at once!"

CHAPTER XXX.

DEATH.

OULD just as soon have seen a ghost," said Beryl, telling the story afterwards; and it may be doubted a ghost would have frightened the girl as much.

Before she had beheld her grandmother in her uniform; and what with being awakened in the middle of the night with such a bustle, what with the glare of the candle and the horror of what such a visit might betoken, she was, as awake in a moment, and standing out in the middle of the room, asking what was amiss, whether anything had happened to her father.

"It was Mr. Elsenham," was the reply; and she seemed to Beryl's fancy to wander off through the streets to the east of her grandmother's cap-frills. "He has had a fever of a severe kind, and a doctor must be sent for immediately." "I suppose Walton can go," said Beryl, who had by this time been rubbing her eyes, and was dressing herself with a trembling hand.

"Impossible; he can't leave his master."

"Then Dick must," remarked Beryl.

"But you send Ann?"

"But you send Gibbs?" retorted Beryl; and the young man and the old woman looked at each other.

"It is not fit to walk to Wattisbridge," went on Beryl, "if she were, she would be afraid."

"But it would be useless for me even to name such a name as Gibbs."

"Dick can ride my pony," Beryl thought out loud; "I suppose he can manage without a saddle and"—

"Go and wake him at once," interrupted Mrs. Elsenham, "and tell him to start directly."

It was not an agreeable commission, but still Beryl started off to perform it. After hammering at the door in vain for a minute or two, she lost patience, and turning the handle, went in.

"Dick! Dick!" she cried. "Good gracious, how he snores! Dick, do wake! (One might as well speak to a post.) Dick!" and at this point Beryl laid down her candlestick, and with both hands shook her cousin; an attention which he repaid by flinging both arms out of bed and striking her across the face with one of them.

"You are like a vicious horse," said Beryl, "that kicks if it is touched. Can you not waken enough to know who I am? I am Beryl, Dick."

"And what the devil do you want with me?" was the courteous reply.

"I want you to get up; Mr. Elsenham is very ill, and we have nobody to send for a doctor, and you can ride my pony."

Whereupon Miss Molozane's fiancé cursed himself if he would do anything of the kind.

"But he has had a fit," remonstrated Beryl, "and it may kill him."

"Give him another chance for his life then by keeping the doctor away," growled Dick, and he deliberately settled himself among the pillows for another sleep.

"You don't mean to say you will not get up?" cried Beryl, aghast. "I am perfectly serious, Dick; we have not a soul about the place who can go but yourself, and Mr. Elsenham is in great danger."

To which the unselfish young man replied that he did not care a damn if the doctor never came, that he would ride over in the morning, if she liked, but that he would not stir a foot then, no, not for the Queen, if she asked him—



"If it was worth my while, I would make you get up, you great lazy useless sot," gasped Beryl, in a rage; and she went out of the room banging the door after her, and ran to Mr. Elsenham's apartment to see what was really the matter.

"The doctor?" said Walton to her, inquiringly.

"Has Dick gone?" asked Mrs. Elsenham.

"Not yet," answered Beryl.

"Good God!" exclaimed her grandmother, "he will be dead before we can get any help; tell him not to delay, and to ride fast."

"I want you, Tilly," was all Beryl said in answer to this; and seizing her sister by the arm, she hurried her away down-stairs, across the kitchen, along stone passages, and so finally out into the yard, talking to her as she went.

"Then who is to go if Dick won't?" asked Miss Molozane.

"I will," answered Beryl; "I am not afraid of going. Trot will not be long cantering over, and I can come back with Dr. Mawley."

"You, Beryl?" said the beauty.

"Yes, I, Beryl, unless you will go in my place."

"What would papa say?"

"That no child of his should marry a man who lies in bed and lets women do men's work," returned Beryl, fiercely; "at least, I know, if I were Mr. Molozane, that is what I should say."

"But, Beryl" —

"Shall we let Mr. Elsenham die and not stretch out a finger to save him?" interrupted Beryl; "if that is what you would like, I cannot do it; so hold me the lantern, Tilly, and make yourself of more use than your future husband."

Very mutely Miss Molozane obeyed this imperious command. If she disliked picking her steps across the wet yard, she was afraid to say so; if she felt it horribly lonely to remain with Trot whilst Beryl ran back for her bonnet and hawl, she yet never ventured to leave her post; if it went

against the grain to see Beryl doing hostler's work, slipping on Trot's bridle and tightening his girths, she did not venture to remonstrate, for Beryl never let her forget whose fault it was that forced her into the stable and out into the night.

"I would not marry Dick," said Beryl, pulling the straps till Trot groaned audibly, "I would not marry Dick if he were as rich as Rothschild and a duke into the bargain; I would rather marry Mr. Elsenham; and if I was you," went on the excited young lady, taking up the stirrup-leather a hole as she spoke, "I would break off the match now, even if you had to end your days in the workhouse. I never felt so tempted in all my life as I did to pour a jug of water over him; I wish you would go back and do it for me, Tilly."

"I will ask grandmamma to insist on his getting up, if you like," said Miss Molozane, meekly.

"You can do about that as you choose," answered Beryl; "he will perhaps be dressed by the time I come back."

"I wish you would not go," pleaded the elder sister, "I am so wretched."

"And so am I — about your marrying Dick," retorted Beryl. "Come, Trot. Good-bye, Tilly;" and the young lady was in the saddle and off before Miss Molozane could offer another word of remonstrance.

Meantime, in the house all was confusion; no one knew what to do, or what to get, or how to be silent. The sick-room was a perfect Babel, while Mrs. Elsenham was in such a state of despair as to suggest grave doubts whether Mr. Elsenham had made a will.

"If he should go off," she cried, marching about the room in dishabille, perfectly regardless of the presence of Walton. "If we only knew what to do. Beryl, have you no books about medicine in the house? Is there no one we could send for Mr. Wern? Where is Beryl? What is she doing away at such a time? Matilda, tell her to come here at once."

“Beryl has gone to Wattisbridge for Dr. Mawley,” said Miss Molozane, drawing her grandmother aside; “Dick would not get up, so she went herself.”

“Beryl — went — herself,” repeated Mrs. Elsenham.

“Yes, but we need not let the servants know it,” answered Miss Molozane, careful even at the moment of appearances; “and do not call Dick, grandmamma,” she entreated, as Mrs. Elsenham hurried out of the room. “We had better not let Dr. Mawley know he was in the house: it looks so bad; it really is a disgrace to us all.”

“I do not care half so much about the look as I do about the fact,” said Mrs. Elsenham, pausing, however, as she spoke; “the idea of his refusing to get up — the notion of Beryl starting off by herself. I declare,” went on the old lady, doing justice for the first time to the grandchild she disliked, — “I declare in any trouble Beryl is worth twenty ordinary people; she has all her wits about her in a moment. She ought to have been a man,” finished Mrs. Elsenham, regretfully; “I wish Beryl had been the boy instead of Dick.”

Which wish suggested such a series of complicated relationships to Miss Molozane, that she felt herself incapable of making any comment on it; and the pair wandered back into the sick-room to watch, and wait, and long for the doctor, who came within the house.

“She is staying with Mrs. Mawley,” he explained to Miss Molozane, speaking about her sister; “I did not wait for my own gig to be got ready, but rode back on Miss Beryl’s pony. No; there is no hope,” he went on, in answer to a question concerning Mr. Elsenham. “He may linger a day or two, though I do not expect it, but the result will be the same. When persons get to his time of life, it is wick, not oil, that is wanting in the lamp — not oil.”

“Will he ever be sensible again?” asked Mrs. Elsenham, who was crying quite naturally and unaffectedly at the doctor’s statement.

"I fear not," was the reply; "but in case he has left any of his affairs unsettled, it might be well to send for his lawyer, or indeed for any lawyer, if there be no change before morning. He might be in possession of his faculties for a short time before death, but I greatly question it — *greatly* question it."

This was a habit of Dr. Mawley's, to repeat some two or three words at the end of every sentence; but in the present case his repetition only confirmed Mrs. Elsenham's fears, and she wept copiously.

"I wish Beryl was back," she said; "she would be of such use. When will she be here, doctor?"

"Shortly, I think," was the reply. "My man was to drive her over; and I told him to lose no time in case of any medicine being required, so we may expect her almost directly."

About half an hour afterwards Beryl made her appearance; but when she arrived, there was nothing more for any one to do, save sit down patiently and wait for the end, which came just as the sun was rising.

"I think," Beryl had said to her grandmother, "I can lay his head more comfortably;" and she was lifting it for the purpose when the jaw fell, the eyes turned, and the last breath passed the old man's lips.

"Oh, doctor! oh, doctor!" cried the girl, but before the doctor could reach her she fell on the floor in a swoon.

"Caused by fright and exhaustion," said the man of medicine, coolly; and he carried her off to bed.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## EAVESDROPPING.

WHEN Mr. Richard Elsenham heard of his relation's death, he made an observation to the effect, that, considering the length of time it had taken him to live, he had been in a remarkable hurry to die.

As a matter of course, the young man expressed himself strongly, using various forms of oath on the occasion, and indulging in a greater number of expletives than ordinary; but the above contains the sense of what he said, and it was all that could be got out of him by any one.

Words wasted were Mrs. Elsenham's remarks on her grandson's laziness and want of manliness. His comment on Beryl's ride for the doctor was "more fool she," and his whole behavior became so perfectly independent, bearish, and unendurable, that long before the funeral everybody in the Dower House conjectured Mr. Elsenham had left no will, and that consequently Dick was a rich man.

"It is an ill wind that blows nobody good," said the sensitive heir to Dr. Mawley; "I am sure I never expected such luck;" and Dick, released at last from petticoat government, began to assert his rights.

Almost the first use he made of his new freedom was privately to propose to Beryl, who refused him with such a storm of reproaches, that Dick mockingly put both hands to his head, lest the tempest should blow it off.

"As you like," he said; adding, with his customary polite-

ness, "but I am damnably mistaken if you do not live ~~at~~ repent your decision."

"And if I had my way," continued Beryl, "Tilly ~~should~~ not marry you either — no, not if we had to keep a school."

Which keeping a school, being Beryl's idea of the acme of human misery, would have left her with the best of the discussion; but that Dick said coolly, he was not by any means certain he should marry Tilly at all.

"Well, then, you shall!" retorted Beryl, with charming inconsistency. Whereupon Mr. Richard Elsenham broke out into a roar of laughter, and told his cousin "her temper was delicious."

Nevertheless Dick was quite in earnest. He did want to marry Beryl, and he did not wish to marry Tilly; and when he and his grandmother returned to town, and left the Dower House to its customary quiet, it became a very grave question with Beryl, whether her sister's engagement ought not to be broken off.

Pride urged one course, poverty suggested another.

"Unfortunately, Beryl," argued Mr. Molozane, "this marriage is the only desirable future I can see for Matilda. Suppose she gives him up, what then?"

"Why then she can live at home, like the rest of us," said Beryl, hotly.

"But will she be satisfied? Without her visits to London, without Mrs. Elsenham's horses, without Mrs. Elsenham's presents, with no excitement or hope of change, will she be content?"

"I am afraid she would be dull," sighed Beryl.

"And further," went on Mr. Molozane, "I really think Matilda is fond of Dick, and that it would be a very serious trouble to her to have to give him up."

"To give — while he can give her up, I suppose you mean, papa?"

"No, Beryl, I do not. She had the chance of having much more than he can give her, and you remember she refused."

"I remember," groaned Beryl.

"And as for Matilda marrying a curate or doctor, or any struggling man, the thing is out of the question," went on Mr. Molozane, speaking his thoughts aloud. "She would be wretched with short means; no affection could reconcile her to a small house, untidy servants, and the want of society, you know yourself, Beryl. Matilda must travel the matrimonial road in a carriage and pair; and as she likes Dick, I am afraid we must let matters remain as they are."

"But if he refuse to marry, papa?" Beryl asked.

"I cannot imagine an impossibility," said Mr. Molozane, coldly; and his daughter forbore to tell him her reason for thinking Dick might decline to fulfil his engagement.

Meantime the estate of the late Mr. Elsenham was discovered not to leave so large an available income as Dick could have desired. There was plenty of property, but it was property which did not yield a high percentage; and altogether, by the time his various interviews with the lawyer came to an end, Mr. Richard Elsenham discovered, fortunately or unfortunately for Matilda, as the reader likes to take it, that it would be as well for him to keep on good terms with his grandmother, and marry the wife she had laid out for him.

Moreover, Dick had a very wholesome dread of Mr. Molozane. That gentleman, he knew, would have entertained no scruple about horsewhipping him had he jilted Matilda; so after suggesting to Mrs. Elsenham that a settlement on his wife would be desirable, and carrying his point, Dick brought his mind to the starting-point again, and professed his readiness to run in the race matrimonial.

Mr. Molozane was anxious also that the marriage should no longer be delayed.

Drifting towards the sea, he was desirous that one daughter should be in safety before he reached it; and accordingly when the trees in Fen Court were putting out their pale green leaves, George Geith, opening another highly glazed

envelope, discovered that Matilda Molozane was at last Mr. Richard Elsenham.

He had known previously that he should not be asked to be present, for the marriage was, in consequence of Mr. Elsenham's recent death, so strictly private, that, excepting the groom's best man, there was not a single stranger invited.

"I never saw such a dismal affair," said Beryl to Mr. Geith on the occasion of his next visit to the Dower House. "To commence with, it was a raw, cold morning, and we all looked blue. If you can fancy Matilda ugly, I should say she was ugly that day. Our teeth were chattering with the cold, and everything went wrong. The sexton had not the doors open, and we had to sit shivering in the carriages till he was sent for and brought the keys. Then he declared Dick told him eleven, instead of ten; and I believe Dick had, though it was all settled and written down, so that there might be no mistake. Dick and Mr. Harley Elsenham lounged about ten minutes afterwards, and then the clergyman had to be brought from his breakfast, and came rushing into the vestry with his mouth full.

"After that the sexton put Mr. Harley Elsenham in the groom's place; and I believe, if it had not been for me, he would have been married to Tilly instead of Dick. Finally, I had such a piece of work to get off her glove — she always will wear them so tight; and Dick could not find the ring. He had put it amongst all his silver; and had to sort through about two pounds of shillings and sixpences before he could find it.

"When it came to the signing, Tilly put Elsenham instead of Molozane; and the clergyman was in such a rage, I am sure he could have sworn. Just as if one was being married every day, and knew what to do by heart!

"We were very glad to get back to the fire, I can assure you; and I think both Tilly and Dick would rather have stayed beside it than gone off."



"After the fuss and to do beforehand," chimed in Louise, "it seemed such a come-down to blue noses and three carriages. I never heard of such a shabby affair in my life. The house was turned inside out for months, and then when it came to the grand ceremonial, everything, as Dick said, 'missed fire.' And if you believe me, Mr. Geith, Granny took all the cake off with her, and did not leave me and Beryl even a crumb to dream on."

"She will be laid up for a week with it at any rate, that's some comfort," remarked Beryl.

"And she will not be much here for the future, that is a greater comfort," added Louise, as she betook herself to her writing with the air of a philosopher whose territory has been encroached upon by the vain inhabitants of a frivolous world.

Poor Loo! in those days she was building edifices great and fair on paper, she was raising fairy palaces, and fought in ink with the giant Poverty, till out of her dreamland she routed the intruder wounded and discomfited. With her pen she vanquished all difficulties, over tempest-tossed waters she floated into safe and pleasant harbors. To her eye, to her hopefulness, to her genius, there seemed nothing impossible; and she said over and over again to Beryl, that she felt certain as she was living, that, if she could but be in London for three months, she should be able to sell all her manuscripts and make everything comfortable at home forever after.

Mentally she asked and received fabulous prices. Three novels a year, and as many plays, to say nothing of short poems and trifling tales.

"Things," said the young lady, "which I could write in half an hour;" was the work she thought she could get through easily.

"Surely," she observed to Beryl, "I could make a thousand a year without any trouble at all; and you should copy for me, and we would get Miss Sparkes to do all our needlework. Would it not be nice, Beryl?"

“It would, only I do not think I should like copying,” answered Beryl.

“Well, perhaps I might not require to copy after a little time. Oh! how I wish I could get to London. I do not mean to Granny’s or Tilly’s, but just to London, by myself; when I could do what I liked and say what I liked, without being snubbed at every turn.”

Very far away seemed London in those days to the child. She did not know she was travelling as fast to the great city as the course of events could take her; she could not tell that before the summer glory had faded from the landscape she would have her wish, and be dropped into the turmoil of the modern Babylon, to make her way to fortune if she could.

Never came ruin much faster to man than it rushed on Mr. Molozane; and when the June roses were once filling the gardens of the Dower House with beauty and perfume, Beryl came to understand that they not merely had to give up the Park, but also everything else, — the dear old home, the familiar haunts, the stately trees, the pleasant fields, — and go forth into the world, shorn of riches and station, to earn their bread.

The news fell upon her like a thunderbolt. All her fears had never suggested anything to her so bad as this. She had dreaded having to sell the Park, having to live with the same straitened economy always; but to be left without a home at all, or the means to take another, to have either to work or to beg, had not come into her calculations; and for a time she moved about the house like one walking in a dream.

Such trouble as the two girls fell into about leaving the Dower House, George Geith, who was staying there for the last time, had never beheld. Such lingering walks over the pleasant fields; such tearful adieus to wood and dell and fountain; such treasuring of wild flowers and ferns and grass and mosses; such a clinging to the very earth, as

h it were in truth their mother ; such sobbings and tations ; such long, long looks, that seemed trying to priate the landscape to themselves forever ; such e in lieu of the old mirth, such sick, faint smiles, such ng conversation. Never had George Geith been in a before which the presence of sorrow pervaded so en-

that made little difference to him. In joy or in grief, countant liked the Dower House better than any other n the face of the earth. He would rather have been hose girls in their trouble, than in any place in Eu- and so he stayed on day after day, stayed for the end, could not, he foresaw, now be far off.

was free of the Dower House as though it had been his ome. He could come and go as business required, and s be certain of a hearty welcome, of a reluctant good- All matters were talked over before him as though he a son or a brother. The irrevocable past, the probable ; Mr. Molozane now spoke of freely to his daughters, George sat by listening in silence, unless appealed to vance or an opinion.

orn out in mind and body, it often happened that Mr. zane slept in the evening twilight ; and then, quite as a r of course, George walked on the terrace outside the y windows, either with the girls or with his cigar for ny ; and when he was alone, one thought stole ever most in his mind — would Beryl care enough for him : days to come to marry him, and if so, would he ever the means to marry her.

he had been rich enough, he was by this time so síre own heart, that he would have decided the matter one r other within the week ; but George felt he was not ch enough, and he had laid it out in his own mind that uld never ask the girl to engage herself to him, unless s prepared to marry her forthwith.

would not have her pledge her faith to an uncertainty.

He would work unfettered by a chain himself. If ever God gave him wealth enough to enable him to marry Beryl Molozane, then with all his heart and soul and strength he would strive to win her for his wife. If not, why it was better for the girl to be free, for her to marry some one else, never suspecting that she would have worked like a galley-slave for his sake. Least of all would he strive by any means to win her now, when wealth lay before her — when she had but to stretch out her hand and take back the lands of her forefathers, and be rich and prosperous and happy.

Yes, happy; for with such a husband as Mr. Wern, with such a sunny temper as her own, how could Beryl be otherwise than happy? more especially — and at this point George sneered bitterly — as she was certain that no such poverty would enter the doors of Molozane Park as might tempt her love to fly out by the window.

And when all was said and done, why did not the girl marry Mr. Wern? Was it that he was prudent, or that she was shy? Where was the hitch? Did Mr. Wern not know how the Molozanes were situated? Had he no suspicion that the father would have to become bankrupt, and the daughters probably have to trust to their grandmother for their support? Or had he proposed and been refused? George could not credit it; for Mr. Wern's manner was not that of a rejected suitor; and his visits to the Dower House were of almost daily occurrence. Would he propose? would she accept?

These were the pleasant questions George Geith was wont to propound to himself in the evenings when sitting out on the terrace, he smoked in the twilight till Mr. Molozane joined him.

It was getting dark on one of these occasions; he had finished a couple of cigars, but still sat on, waiting for Mr. Molozane to waken, and for the moon to rise.

The bench he occupied was at the extreme end of the terrace, and close beside one of the windows of the library.

He had nothing to do but step through that window in order to banish his disagreeable reflections, but he preferred remaining where he was. At times George Geith liked thinking till he grew wretched, and on the evening in question he chanced to be in a self-tormenting mood.

Mr. Wern had been at the Dower House twice that day; beyond a doubt Mr. Molozane had communicated to him the state of his affairs; beyond a doubt, likewise, that revelation would hurry his proposal, and then, then would Beryl have him, would Beryl go up and live at the Park, and become a great lady, courted, flattered, spoiled. Would he lose her forever? Would the Beryl he had known pass away from the simplicity of her present life, away from the morning sunshine, and the roses heavy with dew, to become the stately mistress of Molozane Park? If she liked she might do so, but he, George, would never wish to see her again; he would keep the Beryl he had known shrined in his heart, and spoil the effect of that portrait by the sight of none other.

He had just arrived at this point when Beryl herself came into the library. Everything was so still around that George could hear her asking softly, "Are you asleep, papa?"

"No, Beryl;" and at the answer the accountant wondered if Mr. Molozane had been thinking his thoughts too in the darkness.

"I have come back to ask you something," went on the girl; "I want to know, papa, whether or not you would like me to marry Mr. Wern?"

She spoke the words very slowly and distinctly, so slowly, indeed, that they seemed to fall down singly and separately into George Geith's heart like pebbles dropped into a well.

"What should you like, my darling?" answered Mr. Molozane.

"It would give us back the Park, it would enable us to keep this house, we should not have to leave Withefell at all, it would pay our debts, and make us Molozanes once more," proceeded Beryl, without answering his question.

"It would not give me back the Park," answered her father, with a certain anguish in his voice; "it would not enable me to keep this house; I should have to leave Withefell in any case; for no man shall ever pay my debts for me; and nothing can ever make me a Molozane, with landed possessions and county influence, again."

"Do you mean, papa, that you would take nothing from Mr. Wern, that you would not let him help you, that even if I married him you would not continue to live on here?"

"I could not, Beryl," he replied; "I could starve, but I could not eat the bread of charity; I could work, but I could not live on the purchase-money of my own child. Leave me out of your calculations, Beryl. That I should be glad to see you placed beyond the reach of want, I do not deny, but that your wealth should ever help my poverty is impossible."

"But, papa, from me, from Beryl;" — George, holding his breath and listening as though he had been the meanest eavesdropper, knew that by this time she was on her knees, with her arms around his neck and his hand drawn down on her shoulder, — "from me, from Beryl."

"It would not be from you, Beryl; it would be from Mr. Wern."

"I think I shall marry him, and then you will look at things differently," she said.

"Marry him if you like," replied Mr. Molozane; "you have my full consent to do so; something more than my consent, perhaps," he added, with a sigh. "Could you be happy with him, Beryl; I know he would strive to make you happy; but could you make yourself so, my darling?"

"I could be happy anywhere," she said, "if you were happy too;" and then there came a long silence, during which George knew Beryl was crying, ay, and perhaps her father too.

After that pause — "Papa," began the girl, "I have to give Mr. Wern an answer one way or another to-night: what shall it be?"

“What you like, Beryl; whichever way you decide, I shall be satisfied.”

“Decide for me, papa; say you will live on here, that you will not leave Withefell; and I shall then thankfully marry Mr. Wern.”

Thankfully! with that sob in her voice. If he could have got away from his position without letting them know he had heard the earlier part of the conversation, George Geith would have done so, for his own suspense was becoming so intolerable that he was afraid of losing his self-command. As it was —

“Beryl,” answered Mr. Molozane, “I do not deny it would be a great relief to me if you married Mr. Wern from love, for he could give you everything I should like to see your husband possess, except family; and family in England, without money to back it up, is a mere empty word. Wherever I might be, whatever I might be doing, it would comfort me to think our child had a good husband able to shelter her from all the storms of life; but if you do not love him, Beryl — do you love him? can you love him, my child? May God forgive me for saying it if it be a sin, my favorite child.”

“Papa, you will let him do something for you;” — she said this faintly, with her cheek resting against his. “If I marry him, you will live on here, when I can see you every day, and come to nurse you if you are sick; you will promise that?”

“My darling, if I stayed on here, I must starve.”

“But if Mr. Wern” —

“Stop, Beryl, stop. Should you like to see your father dependent for his daily bread on your husband’s bounty? Should you care to see me eating the crumbs that fall from his table? Somehow it has pleased God to ordain that I shall be as Lazarus; but I would rather go away from Dives’ door, and carry my poverty with me.”

“Mr. Wern would be so happy, papa, to help us all.”

"At present, doubtless," was the reply; "but he might tire hereafter; and if he did not tire, I should. No, Beryl, put me aside altogether; marry for yourself if you marry at all. Consider whether you could be happy at the Park. Remember all Mr. Wern can give you, how fond he is of you, how good and honest and true, and then decide. Only remember that your decision can in no possible way affect my future."

"Louise, papa" —

"Put us both out of the question, Beryl. If there were no such people as Louise and myself in the world, would you marry Mr. Wern? If you would, marry him now; if you would not, do not marry him with any false idea of benefiting us."

"I like Mr. Wern very much," said Beryl, firmly.

"If you only like him, Beryl, you could never be happy as his wife."

"It is a great deal to cast aside, papa," she said, "wealth, and standing, and freedom from anxiety, but if you would not stay on here, I should care for nothing; I should hate the Park with you away from it; I should detest living if you were struggling with poverty; I should be always wanting to get free again and follow you."

How would it end? George, in his excitement, rose up and listened eagerly for Mr. Molozane's next words, which urged Beryl to consider well before she cast aside wealth and standing from her.

With a pathos none the less touching because it was unconscious, Mr. Molozane told his daughter of the roughness of the road that lay before them, of the struggles they should have to make, of the poverty they should have to encounter. He spoke of the comfort it would be to him to know Beryl was suitably married. He said, that in the midst of all his troubles it would be a satisfaction to him to know she was high and dry above the reach of want; he told her precisely how he was situated, and what he proposed doing, and



then he left it to herself to say whether she cared sufficiently for Mr. Wern to marry him. "For that, after all, is the only question we have to consider," added Mr. Molozane, sorrowfully, "that is all."

"No, papa, that is not all," said Beryl; "what I want to know is, whether you and Louey would stay on here? whether you would have a share in my prosperity? Say yes, papa; say yes."

"I can't say yes, Beryl," he returned, "when I mean no."

"You mean you would not let Mr. Wern help you?"

"Yes."

"Not under any circumstance?"

"Not under any."

"You are quite sure, papa, you will not think differently at the end of six months?"

"I have thought about it for too many months not to know my own mind now, Beryl; but you, my darling, you will not decide hastily, you will remember all Mr. Wern can give you, what a certainty of ease and competence you will have if you marry him; what a terrible uncertainty of everything except poverty your life will be if you refuse his offer. You will do nothing rash, Beryl; you will take time to consider."

"I have considered," answered the girl; "and if you insist that I shall separate myself from you and Louise, that I shall act solely and entirely for myself, I cannot hesitate a moment. I should have valued Mr. Wern's wealth for your sake; I should have loved him for what he would have done for you. I could have made up my mind to be happy, and I should have been happy, but with you away I should be miserable. I should repent my marriage every hour in the day, and I should hate the place, and the money, and the show that tempted me to say yes."

"But you might feel differently in a year or two, Beryl," he suggested.

"Should I?" she said. "If you believe that, papa, you know very little about me, though I am your daughter."

"Besides," he went on, without regarding the interruption, "you must marry some day, and leave me."

"I never will," she said; "I will never go so far away that I cannot lay my hand on you at any time. You do not really want me to marry Mr. Wern; you are only trying me; say you are trying me, papa."

There was no answer, nothing but a silence which supplied the place of all words to George Geith; for he knew that Beryl had broken down at last, and was crying out her perplexities on her father's neck.

Now a silence proved more irksome than that to George Geith. Away in the east he could see the moon rising from behind a bank of clouds. If she once emerged from them, he should not be able to leave the terrace unnoticed; whilst, if he passed the window and descended into the garden by the steps, he feared he should excite observation.

Like most listeners, he found himself placed in a nice dilemma: to his right was a thick hedge of privet, to his left that inexorable window; whilst below was a trellis-work, just too high to jump, covered with climbing roses.

Nevertheless, George decided on leaping something; and accordingly, standing on the bench and placing his hand against the wall of the house, he vaulted over the privet hedge and alighted safely on the grass on the other side.

Keeping well under the shadow of the hedge, he walked quickly on, never stopping to draw breath till he was safe among the elms of the avenue leading to Molozane Park.

There he sat down to rest and to think. There were no regular seats along the avenue, but amongst the underwood there were the stumps of many old trees, and of one of these the accountant took possession, while he tried to remember every sentence of the conversation, to recall every varying tone of Beryl's voice.

She did not love Mr. Wern, she would not marry him.

Her father would not let her sacrifice herself for him. These three facts came out of the conversation, and stood forth clear in George Geith's memory. Mixed with them was a vague wonder at the girl refusing such a chance. In its way it seemed to the accountant like a man declining to be made a king, and he marvelled at her. So astounding indeed did it seem to him, that he left his seat and went to look at the property she had refused at Molozane Park, which, bathed in moonlight, he could see from the end of the elm avenue.

There lay the goodly lands that had been owned by the Molozanes for centuries; there were the broad pastures, and the noble trees, and the silvery lake, over which the eyes of each successive owner had looked; there was the great house, white in the moonlight, in which the Molozanes had found it so easy to accommodate guests. Back amongst the plantations lay the stables that the Molozanes had once filled with hacks and hunters. To the south sloped the gardens which the Molozanes had stocked with every rare fruit and flower. Never a miser had there been amongst them; never a Molozane but had been a prince in his hospitality, and royal in his expenditure. They had kept open house in the days when their prosperity was at its zenith. A few servants more or less, a few horses to spare, a more liberal table than was needful, what were these things, what were these mere trifles to the Molozanes, whose income was so regal, whose ideas were so kingly?

And so they had gone on spending, for each succeeding generation inherited the tastes, though not the income, of its predecessor; guests still came on; horses still filled the stables; costliest exotics composed the bouquets of the ladies who were always staying at the Park. There were carriages and servants, there was feasting and revelry; there was riding, and driving, and flirting all the day long; whilst ruin was stealing up to the house to oust the Molozanes — the liberal, open-hearted, proud Molozanes — from their beloved home.

Thus the years had passed, and from father to son the Park had descended, more encumbered, less valuable than of old.

Heiresses might have redeemed the Molozanes, but somehow these men, who wanted money so much, always married for love, or beauty, or grace; and the heiresses that fell in their way were none of them lovable, beautiful, nor graceful.

So long as the place could be kept up, the Molozanes still galloped on, and galloped down; till the property came to Ambrose Molozane, who married a woman whom all the world thought to be an heiress, but who brought nothing in her hand to help to restore the ancient family and its old position. It was a very poor, shabby establishment, when contrasted with the establishments which had gone before him, that Ambrose Alfred Molozane kept up at the Park.

His life had been a struggle with appearances, a fight with poverty, a war against circumstances, a series of useless endeavors to retrieve his position; which endeavors left him finally where George Geith, looking out over the old possessions, sorrowed to find him.

All the accountant's own pride of family rose up in rebellion against this man of ancient blood having to make way for one of the newly rich — for a man to, whom the Park, with its thousand-and-one recollections, was a dwelling, nothing more. It was just; it is the world's discipline that he who has worked through the day shall rest in the evening, and that he who has not toiled in the spring and summer of his life must work when his manhood's prime is past and age is creeping on him; whilst it is God's unchanging law that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children. and that for years of thoughtless extravagance, of lavish expenditure, of frivolity, and pleasure, and rioting, there shall come a terrible day of reckoning, when there shall be tear instead of laughter, sorrow in place of mirth.

It was just, but it was pitiful. Standing there, gazing

all that was passing away from the Molozanes, there came swelling up in George Geith's heart all that longing for possession, all that sympathy for the loss of possession, which is so universal with man. Passing away from earth, there is nothing we long to hold so much as earth. Land is a visible wealth; green fields, swelling uplands, fruitful valleys, are to the most of us what outspread hoards of gold prove to the miser — tangible evidences of wealth.

But the green fields, and the waving trees, and the swelling uplands, and the silvery lake, were all passing away from the Molozanes, — passing away as fast as poverty could drag them. A few weeks more, and the old place would fall into other hands; strangers would be dwelling at the Dower House. In the familiar rooms, new-comers would assemble; where Beryl's feet had passed, other steps would follow; where her voice had made sweet ringing, happy music, different tones would enter discordantly. There might be laughing children, there might be loving and wooing, but there would be never again a Beryl in the Dower House forever.

Forever and forever.

Could she cast it all away; could she tear herself from the old familiar haunts, from her birthplace, from the home she had loved, as we never love but one home on earth; could she do this? It seemed so small a matter to marry, so enormous an advantage to secure, that although George Geith had heard her say she would choose poverty with her family to the Park without them, he could not realize that he had heard correctly — that he had heard her speak her determination, without a shadow of turning in his voice.

If she loved any one else, he could understand her decision; but for a girl whose fancy was free to throw away such a chance, seemed to George Geith incredible.

At the moment he never paused to ask himself whether he would wed for houses, and lands, and money, and position; whether he would not choose poverty and freedom,

rather than wed without love. He only thought of Beryl and Molozone Park — thought and marvelled — until he finally worked himself round to the belief that she would marry Mr. Wern, and keep the property in the family.

He was wronging Beryl — wronging her for the last time.

Beside the roses, under the moonlight, Beryl was telling Mr. Wern, at that very instant, not without tears, for the girl's heart was sad both for him and for herself, that she had made up her mind, and that it was impossible she could become his wife.

She liked him better than she had ever done before. She liked him for the way he pleaded his suit, for the intense love he could not help revealing, for the hopelessness of his hopeless passion, for his gentle tenderness, for his despairing grief.

What to him were these houses and lands? What were banking balances and a thriving business? What were the possessions of this world and the pleasures thereof to the successful at that moment, when the girl told him she could not become his wife, that she could give him everything but love — but love, for want of which the man was perishing?

Then, like one dying of thirst in the desert, to whom all goods and all treasures are offered, save water, he cried out in his anguish, showing her all his suffering, all his cruel disappointment.

“Could it never be?” he asked; “if he waited; if he had patience, would she not have him for his very love's sake? Might this future never come?”

And Beryl, blinded with tears, choking with sobs, had to pause before she could answer “never.”

Never! — like a faint, distant murmur it came stealing out of the lonely, desolate future — a future which no woman's love might ever illumine for him, no fresh glory hope ever lighten with a momentary brightness. All the misery, all the regret, all the unutterable loneliness of an empty heart, was coming towards him, and “never” was the

first faint sound which told of its approach. It was the sighing sough of the wind that announces a tempest, against which men must battle. It was the far-off grating of the wheel of the hearse which comes to take his dearest and best away from his sight. It was death to every plan, to every hope, to every joy; and in his agony Mr. Wern could not help exclaiming, —

“Oh! Beryl, if it may never be; if we must part; I would to God I had never seen your face.”

“Forgive me,” she was crying helplessly by this time; crying among the roses, under the moonlight. “If I have ever made you think I could be your wife, if I have thought it myself, if I have ever done you a wrong, and led you to fancy things might be different, you know what made me do it. Forgive me, though I shall never, never, never forgive myself.”

God help him. He learnt at that moment just what his wealth had done for him — just what Beryl would have married him for, had she consented to become his wife; and he stood for a moment silent, with her hand clasped tightly in his, waiting till the pain should be overpast — till he could speak to her calmly and steadily as he wished.

“My child,” he said at last, — and, oh! how old he felt, and how young she seemed, as he called her by that name, — “it is my life that I have lost this night; but I would not have you give me back my life at the price you imply. It is over now; the hope, the fear, the long suspense; and I can let you go, satisfied that you are right, that I am wrong.”

But still he did not let her go. He only drew her nearer, closer to him, whispering, whilst he trembled violently, “Kiss me, Beryl. — kiss me for once.”

Had George Geith been eavesdropping then, even he would have forgiven them both. Some men do not find it so easy to coffin their dead hopes; some women cannot so readily help to pile the earth into the grave, as many think.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## IN LONDON.

It was a hard matter for a man like Mr. Molozane to have to flee to Basinghall Street for refuge ; and how hard he had found his trial to bear was shown by hollow cheeks and gray hair, when he came forth from that sanctuary, free of debt indeed, but penniless.

The world was all before him ; there was room enough in it to beg or starve ; but if he wished to earn a living for himself and his daughters, he had no choice save to stay in London, where Mr. Wern obtained a situation for him in the great shipping-house of Murphy, Dowsett, and Raikes, at a salary of two hundred and fifty pounds per annum.

Mr. George Geith, who knew the rates at which this wealthy firm in question were in the habit of paying their clerks, never believed in that two hundred and fifty at all ; he thought the fifty without the two hundred much more likely to be near the mark, and the accountant was correct. The salary was a matter of arrangement between Mr. Raikes, the managing partner and Mr. Wern, who fancied that Mr. Molozane's business capabilities were of the smallest ; that in fact, he would be only useful, as he said frankly to Mr. Raikes, to be a check on the junior clerks, and to answer civil questions in a civil manner.

But in this Mr. Wern proved to be mistaken.

Mr. Molozane had no idea of taking his money and doing as little as possible for it ; and he put his shoulder to the wheel in a manner which won for him the cordial dislike



all the clerks in Messrs. Murphy, Dowsett, and Raikes' employment.

To do nothing and be paid a salary for it, was their idea of perfect happiness ; to work before face and idle when their employer's back was turned, was their conception of duty ; and accordingly, the sight of a middle-aged man setting himself to learn all the ins and outs of the business with a will, being punctual to his time, being honest in his occupation, filled the young fry with unspeakable disgust.

But to their good or bad opinions Mr. Molozane was equally indifferent. By work he and his had for the future to live, and though business was work he detested, though he disliked his employment, his position and his employers, he never slackened in his efforts, but labored on for the sake of the young girls who were dependent on him.

At the top of the Caledonian Road, beyond the Cattle Market, there is still, I believe, a place called Stock Orchard Crescent, and there the Molozanes pitched their tent.

The house was of Beryl's finding, and I doubt if, all things considered, she could have found a better.

To be sure, even then the place had its drawbacks ; but the situation was quiet, the houses were semi-detached, the rooms were large for London, and the rent not excessive.

Mr. Molozane could walk from thence to Leadenhall Street, and the girls could readily get into the country. Highgate was not far off, Hornsey and Crouch End were accessible ; and all the new villas, terraces, and streets, that now cover the Seven Sisters' Road, and the upper part of Holloway, were undreamed of.

Into her new home Beryl carried the same happy face, the same courageous heart, the same power of adaptation as had won George Geith's heart in the old days departed. She had wept out her tears ; and in the spring time of life, as in the April of the year, sunshine follows cloud. Over Molozane Park, over the Dower House roses, over the familiar household goods that had been carried from before

her to strange and unfamiliar places, she had rained showers of sorrow ; but the trouble was now gone and past ; the pain had been endured and was over ; and in the happiness of having her father with them again, in the busy little cares of housekeeping, in the occupation of making both ends of their income meet, Beryl, safe on land once more, forgot the fury of the storm she had breasted, and commenced extracting such pleasure as was possible from the new life in which she was just starting.

To a nature like Beryl's, if I may say so without detracting from any favorable opinion my readers may entertain of her, furnishing was a delicious employment, a charming amusement, which had not fallen to her lot previously. Even had she been compelled to cut and contrive, to grudge carpeting here and curtains there, shopping and arranging on the most limited scale would have possessed the greatest fascination for her ; but as it was with money, absolute wealth, at her back, Beryl revelled in upholstery, and walked about London as happy as the mistress of ten thousand a year. Had the girl known where the money really came from, which filled her purse and paid for her various little purchases, she would not, I think, have gone on her errand with quite so light a heart ; but she had accepted the sum which furnished their new home, and left besides something over for a rainy day, in perfect good faith from her sister, Mrs. Richard Elsenham, in whose hands Mr. Wern had placed it before he went abroad, to try if there were any balm in absence for a broken heart.

Matilda's honesty had been subjected to a severe test by the trust Mr. Wern reposed in her. Her necessities were many, her supplies scanty, and the evil one had put so many pretty trinkets, heavenly bonnets, and enticing dresses, in her way just about the time the money was left with her, that she felt if she had not hastened to place the whole amount in Beryl's keeping, she never, never, never could have resisted the temptations which beset her.

Further, Beryl's thanks were very trying to a person who saw how little she merited them. Albeit a fashionable girl, a spendthrift selfish woman, Matilda had a species of conscience which pricked her when Beryl burst into tears, and begging "Tilly's pardon for every hard thing she had ever before said or thought of her, declaring this money would make all the difference to them between wretchedness and happiness."

"We can take a house and furnish it, and get out of these miserable lodgings," went on the poor little thing, counting all the blessings she saw looming in the future, on her fingers; "but, Tilly, are you sure you do not want it? I will only take half; I can manage nicely on half, and it is much: you are too good and generous, my darling."

With her cheeks on fire, Mrs. Richard Elsenham implored her sister "not to mention it." She would, to do her justice, have liked nothing better than to tell her how small a share she had in the good work; but being bound to secrecy, and knowing, moreover, the present would have made Beryl stretched had she known the source whence it proceeded, she merely stated that the money had been given to her to do what she liked with, and that she liked beyond anything to see Beryl happy, and her father comfortable.

"I would give the world," she said, "to be able to be the same to anybody you have been, Beryl, and to have anybody love me as people love you;" which was perfectly true.

During her interview with Mr. Wern, the beauty had thought that if such a man had loved her as he loved Beryl, such a man with such an income, — she might have been every happy woman.

As it was, Mrs. Richard Elsenham was not a happy woman; and Beryl left the house greatly delighted with the effect of her finances, but sadly down-hearted concerning her father's tears and mournful little speeches.

She then commenced house-hunting and house-furnishing.

What miles Beryl travelled ; what numbers of house-agents she consulted ; what scores of omnibuses she entered ; east, north, west, and south she travelled, to settle on Stock Orchard Crescent at last, to George Geith's dismay. Her chosen residence was too near the Bemmidge's to please him. "He did not think Stock Orchard Crescent a nice place," he said, "and was certain that old-fashioned house at Hackney, with the large garden, would have pleased Mr. Molozane far better. For his part, he disliked Holloway intensely, and he could not imagine what the young ladies saw in it to fancy. He admired Hackney. The house was a better house, and the rent no higher."

But in this matter Beryl was firm. Louise did not care for Hackney ; she had seen that charming locality on a wet day, and took up a prejudice against it. The house looked dull ; the garden damp ; the rooms were dark ; the kitchen wretched ; there were no good pantries ; the situation was not good. Louey was sure she could never exist in that brick prison ; and, on the other hand, Louey felt confident she should feel at home in a house in Stock Orchard Crescent.

"She has been amusing herself arranging how all the furniture is to stand," finished Beryl ; and George Geith knew that settled the matter.

The Autocrat of all the Russias might have issued his edict in vain to Beryl, after Louey had spoken.

"Hang the precocious chit," muttered the accountant, as he walked away from their lodgings ; but he spoke out of his anger, rather than out of his heart. In the days to come he was glad to remember Beryl had suffered her sister to choose for them ; he was glad to recollect every step of his wretched way had been determined on by others, rather than by himself.

After Whitecross Street, any home would have seemed delicious to Mr. Molozane, how much more the cheerful, pleasant home where Beryl, her sister, and one of their

former servants were located. Something of Beryl's happy temperament must have come to her from her father, for he sat down under the shadow of his fig-tree, which had grown for him in this strange land, contented and unrepining.

"Dare I murmur," he said, in answer to some involuntary expression of admiration from George Geith, "while so much is left me: health to work, and work to do, and children to work for? I thought at one time I never could have parted with the old place and lived, but we never know how much we can bear till we have borne it."

Listening to him, the accountant thought, that we also never know how much other people can bear, till we have seen them carrying their burden. He had wondered, in the days gone by, how Mr. Molozane would endure bankruptcy and beggary. He had pictured all kinds of possibilities, save always a situation in the city and a house at the top of the Caledonian Road. The position was too commonplace and comfortable for him to realize, and so for a time George Geith felt Beryl's new house to be a myth, and the increase of happiness it brought to him incredible.

Never a man in London did the accountant envy in those days after the Molozanes took possession of their new house. He might have lived with them had he liked to avail himself of Mr. Molozane's numerous invitations.

No more solitary evenings for the once lonely man; no more weary Sundays with endless peregrinations over stony-hearted streets. There was a welcome always for him when he chose to go and get it. He had a home, the door whereof was always open to him. Let the day be never so dull and weary, there was light and warmth waiting for him at the top of the Caledonian Road, if he took the trouble of walking thither for it.

He had not now to travel to Hertfordshire to hear the music that charmed him most. Like the chiming of sweet bells, the tones of Beryl's voice rang in his ears continually. There was no more winter for him, no more frost and snow.

The sunshine had travelled from the Dower House to gladden his heart, and the man was so happy that his life seemed to be passed in fairyland. .

As for Beryl, any one might have thought she had taken a new lease of enjoyment, that she had gained an inheritance instead of losing all she ever had been proud and careful over, too proud and too careful also for them. There was no trace of sadness about her, no want of elasticity in her movements, no decrease of vivacity as she discharged her familiar household duties. If the past had worn any darksome channels in her heart, the glad, bright, full stream of youth, sparkling on its way, hid all traces of trouble away both from her own sight and that of her neighbors. It is when years have dried up the over-abundant waters of gladness, when there is no musical brook gliding onward to meet the future, when there is no green sward on the banks, no gushing spring of hope left to replenish the bed once filled to overflowing by the ruthless chattering river, that eye looking at the furrows worn in that bygone time understands fully how much can be suffered by youth which youth happily forgets to remember.

It was thus with Beryl at any rate. Her troubles were dead and coffined, and she revisited not their graves. In some stratum of her nature each grip she had suffered was lying away hidden like a fossil, but like the fossil of an ancient world were all past sorrows to the girl who lived in a perpetual sunshine, in an unchanging meridian, where no shadow fell. Fond of the country as she had been, 'tis a truth which must be confessed, that Beryl liked London amazingly also. She had detested Kensington and her grandmother, but a house in London, which held her father and sister, and unbounded personal liberty besides, was quite another affair.

Dare I confess that she delighted in the shops in Upper Street, that the crowds of people, the countless conveyances, and the eternal excitement, charmed her beyond description?

London to her was a great theatre, with perpetually shifting scenes and actors.

It was a new world, containing a race of men hitherto undreamed of. The pace was so fast, it suited her active spirit; and she danced about the rooms of their new home, along the broad hall and up the staircase, with light feet and a lighter heart, in time to the strains of the barrel-organs that infested Stock Orchard Crescent on account of its reputed quietness.

In after-days, when that house was again to let, George Geith went and paid the care-takers to allow him to go over the well-remembered rooms alone. Through every apartment he wandered, and at last returned to the drawing-room, which he re-furnished and re-peopled out of the storehouses of memory.

To him it was bare and desolate no longer. In his fancy he saw her sitting before him, with the sunshine streaming on her hair; he heard the tones of her voice; he saw her bright, happy smile; he beheld the caressing hand stretched forth to touch Louey as she passed. Every picture hung in its wonted place; the very perfume of her favorite flowers seemed pervading the air; the remembered books and knick-knacks lay on the tables; and as he stood dreaming out his dream, an Italian organ-grinder struck up "Johnny Sands."

Many a time had he listened to Beryl lilting out that most absurd song through the now deserted house; but now the strain provoked no answering smile from the lonely listener.

Ah, no! for as the air went ringing through the glad sunshine, all his dream melted away, and left him standing in the dismantled room — desolate!

"There was a man, named Johnny Sands,  
Who married Betsy Hague,  
Although she brought him gold and lands,  
She proved a terrible plague.  
She proved a terrible plague.

## GEORGE GEITH OF FEN COURT.

" One day said he, 'I'll drown myself,  
The river runs below;'  
' Oh, do!' said she, 'you saucy elf,  
I wished it long ago.'  
I wished it long ago.

" ' Oh! tie my hands behind my back,  
For fear my courage fail, —

" Then down the hill his loving bride  
She ran with all her force,  
To push him in; — he stepped aside,  
And she fell in, of course.  
And she fell in, of course.

" Splashing, dashing, like a fish,  
' Oh! save me, John!' she cried;  
' I would, my love — I wish it much, —  
But you my hands have tied.'  
But you my hands have tied."



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## PLEASANT HOURS.

not to be expected that the Bemmidges should be ignorant of the arrival of Mr. Molozane and Stock Orchard Crescent.

Molozane was too often in Fen Court; Mr. Geith sat on the knife-boards of the Holloway omnibuses for lectures not to be formed on the subject.

Every word for it," said Mr. Bemmidge, who never taken into the plot of marrying George to his daughter, "that Geith has at last found a house where to put up his hat;" and this opinion, which the wine-merchant expressed gleefully, and to which the ladies listened with interest, received confirmation on the following Sunday when Mr. Geith was encountered at Hornsey riding abroad with two young ladies.

"An un-looking pair as you would desire to meet," said the milliner, with a snort, "and dressed like Quaker-people. You would have thought Mr. Geith would have been seen out with such a couple of dowdies;" and she, against whom the charge of simplicity could not be brought by anybody, tossed her head disdain-

fully in Stock Orchard Crescent," remarked Mr.

"My father and two daughters, and are the people with whom he spent so much time the summer after he was here."

"There's no accounting for tastes," answered Ger-  
can only say neither of them would be mine."

“Andrew says they have been great people,” said Mrs. Bemmidge, thoughtfully.

“Andrew talks nonsense,” snapped Miss Gilling; and there was a pause after this frank observation.

“I was thinking of calling upon them,” said Mrs. Bemmidge, at length. “Andrew says, knowing them has introduced Mr. Geith to a first-rate business connection, and who knows but they might do something for us? I am sure, with the children growing up, any person who could bring orders would be worth cultivating.”

“I don’t know who would give orders for blacking if they had to drink it,” answered Miss Gilling. To which Mrs. Bemmidge replied, —

“You and mamma never refuse to take it, at any rate, when it is offered to you.” A remark so undeniably true, that it induced Miss Gilling to turn the conversation.

“I wonder what kind of style they live in?” she said, ignoring her sister’s last observation.

“You can see, if you like to call upon them with me,” answered Mrs. Bemmidge; and the pair called accordingly upon Miss Molozane, greatly to Miss Molozane’s astonishment.

Avowedly, they came as friends of Mr. Geith, and Beryl felt naturally a little disappointed in Mr. Geith’s friends; but when once that gentleman had told her all he knew about them, she rested satisfied, and began taking amusement out of her new acquaintances, as she did out of everything else that came in her way.

Not an atom proud was my heroine. If the absence of pride be a fault, I am sorry for it; but she was not proud, nevertheless. Somehow she identified herself so little with low acquaintances, in her own mind; in her own hopes and happiness she stood so entirely aloof from those with whom she was thrown. Knowing people was an affair so entirely outside of herself, that she never gave the matter of gentility a thought; poor though they might be, the Molozanes had always been *the* Hertfordshire Molozanes, and, as such,

Molozanes with an assured station ; and the old saying, that a cat may look at a king, holds equally true conversely, — without any loss of dignity a king may look at a cat ; and without any loss of caste in her own eyes, Beryl looked at the Bemmiges, took them for grist, and ground them up, for George Geith's delectation, in her ridicule mill.

From Mrs. Gilling to her youngest grandchild, Beryl could take off every turn of expression, every peculiarity of manner. She knew Mrs. Gilling's favorite preachers and platters of food off by heart. She could tell to a nicety whether the dinner Mrs. Gilling had "dropped in" to partake of at her daughter's had pleased her or not, whether she had had her due share of the crackling, and if the stuffing had proved to her taste.

"I think they must live on pork," Louey observed. "We have never called there yet that there has not been an all-pervading smell of grease and onions. We stopped there once for 'lunch,' as Mrs. Bemmidge called it, but I will never stop again ; Beryl may if she likes ; I think she found her pudding very nice."

"So nice that the little ones finished it," observed Beryl ; "what nasty children they are. They would pick up pieces of pudding out of the cinders, I do think. I should like to have the girl here for a day, just to see what she would eat if she had her own will."

"I hate the child," said George, emphatically.

"That is ungrateful," observed Louey, maliciously, "for she told us the other day she was very fond of you, and that you would be her uncle when you married Miss Gilling — oh ! Beryl, forgive me — I forgot. I did not mean to tell him — I did not, indeed."

"You need not vex yourself about the matter," George answered, looking as he spoke at Beryl, who was laughing and blushing at one and the same time ; "I shall certainly be the brat's uncle when I marry Miss Gilling, but that will be never."

"I should not like you if you married her," said Looey, gravely. "I am afraid all friendship would be at an end between us."

"I shall not subject your friendship to so severe a test," George replied, amused in spite of his annoyance; "for I think Miss Gilling would as little suit me as I should suit her."

"Although she sings so beautifully," said Beryl, demurely.

"Beryl can sing so like her, that when I shut my eyes, I think it is Miss Gilling, and am afraid to smile," said Louise. "She was here the other day squalling, and a little boy out in the street did one of her roulades after her so smartly, that Beryl had to go out of the room. I wish I could draw, Mr. Geith. I would give anything to be able to sketch Miss Gilling at the piano."

Whereupon the accountant sat down and produced a caricature of the young lady, curls and all, which would surely have delighted Miss Gilling, could she have seen it.

"I like that young man she is really going to marry," said Beryl, as George proceeded with his task, Louise helping him by looking over his shoulder the while. "He is one of your clerks, is he not, Mr. Geith? Mr. Foss, I mean."

"Is Foss going to marry Miss Gilling?" asked George, suddenly pausing, and looking up with a certain expression of displeasure.

"I do not know; I suppose so," stammered Beryl, who saw she had made a mistake somehow. "I think he must be going to marry her."

"Why do you think so? — that is, if I may ask such a question?"

"Because — because — how you do tease one, Mr. Geith. I do not know why I think it, and besides I might be quite mistaken."

After which answer, spoken pettishly, Beryl relapsed into silence, and refused to laugh at Miss Gilling's portrait when it was finished.

"We must be careful what we say to Geith about the Bemmidges," she remarked to her sister afterwards. "I hope I did not do any harm by what I told him. I wonder why he did not want Mr. Foss to marry 'Jurtrude'?" marvelled Beryl, mocking Mrs. Gilling's pronunciation of her daughter's name.

"I fancy I can guess," said Mr. Molozane, looking up from his newspaper, in which he had not been so absorbed but that he could listen to his daughters' conversation; "he thinks Miss Gilling may learn too much about his business from Mr. Foss, and I think he is very likely to be right; not but what he is doing so well that I should have imagined it could make little difference to him who knew he was getting on."

"Is Mr. Geith rich then, papa?" asked Beryl.

"Not rich, but growing rich," was the reply; and Mr. Molozane resumed his paper, whilst the girls pursued their several occupations in silence.

The eldest was, as usual, engaged in needlework; the youngest, according to custom, writing, for she was strong again, and her family allowed her to amuse herself in her own way, without let or hindrance.

Sometimes, indeed, when her face got flushed, and her hands began to tremble, Beryl would essay to entice her from her manuscripts; but as Louise grew older she grew less manageable, and would push her sister away, saying, with tears lying on her cheeks, —

"Go away, Beryl, you come between me and them; I can't see them while you are standing there."

"I wish you would not talk like that," Beryl sometimes ventured to expostulate.

"Talk like what? It is true; I do see everybody I write about a great deal plainer than I see you now. There, they are all gone; and what I had to say is gone. You have spoiled one of the best passages I ever wrote. I shall have to go to my own room if you do not leave me alone."

And at last, for very peace's sake, Beryl did leave her alone, and let her write verses to her heart's content.

Very gradually both father and sister were coming to understand that there is something stronger than parental authority, than affectionate solicitude, something which may lie in abeyance for a while, but which ultimately will have its own way — genius.

Almost in spite of themselves, a conviction forced itself on Mr. Molozone and Beryl, that the talent they had first ignored, and then striven to keep in swaddling clothes, was growing into a giant which should master them all.

"If your sister's health keep good," said George Geith to Beryl, one lovely summer's evening, when he overtook her in High Street, Islington, and they walked home together to Stock Orchard Crescent, "she will become a famous woman yet."

"But if her health should not keep good, Mr. Geith," answered Beryl, "what fame would compensate us for that?"

"She will write in any case," was the reply, "so you must hope for the best;" an easy matter with Beryl, who began from that time to build air-castles as to what Louise's genius was to do for them. She knew she was not clever herself; she knew there was nothing she did particularly well, no one accomplishment in which she excelled; so, when once the idea took firm and full possession of her, that Louey was going to achieve "great things," she dwelt upon it in the sure conviction that some day "papa would be able to rest again, that Louey's verses would in the long run bring her in a golden harvest."

Twelve months after they came to London, hope began to have some tangible food on which to exist.

Spite of Miss Gilling's strictures on their plainness, the two sisters were really very pretty girls, and their blushing country faces gained them much favor in the eyes of publishers.

There is not much gold lying about the base of the hill

of fame; and Louise Molozane, spite of her eager exertions, found none of the precious metal at all; but she got what was almost as good to her — praise, encouragement in the present, assurances of success in the future.

She had kindly notes from editors, favorable opinions from "readers," confirmatory smiles from publishers. Poems were not salable articles, and tragedies could not be thought of; but still, "when she directed her attention to other branches of literature," "when she began to write short tales, for instance," there was no fear of failure. She had genius, she had youth. Let her read more and write less, said many a good-natured adviser, and she would yet be one of the first authoresses of the day.

Such were the sum and substance of a statement made to Beryl by an editor whom she had the happiness of seeing personally. At first he took her for the owner of the manuscript for which she called, and was more reticent of his remarks; but upon Beryl assuring him she could not write anything more ambitious than a letter, and that "not a long one," she added, he gave his opinion *in extenso*, and sent the girl away so happy that she could have danced the whole way up to the top of the Caledonian Road, had she not feared scandalizing the passers-by.

By degrees also Mr. Molozane came to be associated with his daughter's literary efforts. He began by letting her repeat scraps of her verses as they sat in the firelight, or toiled in the summer twilight up Highgate Hill, or wandered through the green fields round about Hornsey and Crouch End, places that are almost built up to now, but which were then miles and miles away in the country.

In those days father and youngest-born were so much together, that, had Beryl been of a jealous temperament, she might have thought herself hardly done by, but the girl never felt anything but thankfulness that "papa and Louey were so happy, that he was coming at last to understand her writing, and to like her doing it."

Out of the past there have been always a few things standing that have seemed unutterably pitiful, things that I have either seen myself, or that have come to my knowledge through others; and not the least pitiful appears the picture that now rises before me, of that poor, proud father wandering about London with a bundle of his daughter's manuscripts in his hand; manuscripts which were invariably returned to him unaccepted.

Often and often, as time went by, George Geith wondered how it would end, into what port the manuscripts now floating rudderless would drift at last; and whilst the Molozanes grew more eager, more confident, he became less satisfied about the probable result, and began to speculate whether Louise's talent, though certain, might not be likewise unmarketable.

It was a question he was not able to shake off. Till Mr. Molozane took the matter up, George had not troubled himself as to how it would all end; but he could not endure to see the ruined gentleman commence building such hopes on Louise as he had built on the Sythlow Mines, unless they were certain of fruition.

As he met Mr. Molozane hurrying off in his dinner-hour to the Row or the Strand; as he found him in the evenings carefully copying out Louise's poems; when he saw the looks of pride the man was continually casting on the tall, slight girl who had so shot up since George Geith saw her, the accountant felt that disappointment would be something too terrible for them to face.

Often, when he was talking to Beryl, he tried to discover whether the idea of failure had ever presented itself; but Beryl was so provokingly sanguine, that no doubts could be instilled into her, and it was so pleasant to him to listen to her hopeful chatter, her happy face seemed to her lover so lovely, that he never had the heart to tell her he considered the result of Louise's labors problematical.

Happy days were those for all that little band — happy for father and daughters and for guest. There was no cloud



on the horizon, no haunting dread in their minds, no sign of tempest in the sky; nothing had as yet occurred to trouble the peaceful current of their lives. There was no symptom of delicacy about Louise now. Mr. Molozane seemed to be growing young again. Beryl looked a little weary perhaps at times, but what of that? George hoped soon to be able to take all responsibility off her shoulders. He was only waiting to propose formally until he had a certain sum in hand over and above the income he made annually out of figures. He had little fear but that ultimately Beryl would listen favorably to his suit. He felt sure Mr. Molozane would look kindly on him for a son-in-law. At first he intended to take a house in or near Stock Orchard Crescent, unless, indeed, Beryl wished to remain under the same roof with her father, in which case he would not cross her inclination.

All the mad fever of fear and hopelessness was over, and George Geith, the successful man of business, merely waited the result of one or two speculations before asking Beryl to be his wife.

It was then late in the autumn, and ere Christmas he hoped to be visiting in Stock Orchard Crescent as a future relative. He liked going there as a friend; but his heart throbbed joyfully at the anticipation of something nearer, closer still.

He had worked for this; he had been silent for it; and in the depths of his stern, reserved nature lay the consciousness that in the sweat of his brow he had expiated his former errors, and earned the prospect of his present felicity.

Some memory of that past, some thought that possibly a few particulars which could not be inquired about by a friend, might be asked by a future father-in-law, had perhaps contributed to a certain tardiness in his suit. He had wanted to feel his footing certain before he ventured on another step; and now he mentally praised himself for his caution, and began to shape more tangibly the future of his life.

Even as the young authoress dreamt her dreams, so

George Geith dreamt his ; and as the time drew on for fruition to crown his hopes, happiness more swift-footed than he crossed the Molozane's threshold, and brought acceptance of one of Louise's often-rejected pieces to the family.

"To be sure it was not to be paid for, but the money is certain to follow," said the girl, with a little of her old air of sober wisdom ; and she turned again to her writing-table to pen quires more poetry, on the strength of disposed of four verses of rhyme.

"Money is certain to follow," repeated Solomon, after she had been writing for a long time ; "it is a mere question of time ;" and she covered her happy face with her hands. "It is coming, Beryl ; I feel it ; and then shall we do grand things. I am a little tired to-night ; shall we build castles, Beryl ? when I am a great authoress, where shall we live ? when I have a thousand pounds, what shall we do with it ?"

What would they not do ? that was rather the question. A hundred thousand would not have bought all they mentally purchased, sitting in the firelight glow.

Molozane Park, or at least the Dower House ; a house for papa ; a pony phaeton for themselves ; furniture *ad lib*.

"What color should you like the drawing-room curtains," asked Louise.

"We would have everything just as it used to be."

"Except that you would not mind setting a room aside for me and my rubbish, as you used to call it," laughed Louise.

"I think I will give you a room when you make money enough to buy the house," answered Beryl.

"Wait a little longer," said Louise, "and you shall see what you will see ;" and so, hand clasped in hand, they chattered on, seeing all things in the future save the reality which was approaching them, building all kinds of fancy habitations save those in which they were really to dwell.

Thinking of them, but children as they were, tracing out so fair a path, I am loth to tell of the roads they had separately to travel.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE.

MISFORTUNES never overtake us at the expected time; they never come from the expected source. It is never the storm we have been looking out for, which upsets our craft on its way over the billows of life; it is always some tiny leak, some treacherous rock, some strange collision, which shipwrecks us in the end.

We look anxiously towards the dark cloud, which we expect to pour out its fury on us; but, behold the cloud passes away in another direction, and the storm, when it comes, bursts upon us in the midst of sunshine, in the midst of joy. I think the vagaries of trouble are the strangest things in this strange world. The way in which the cup of happiness is dashed from one; the way in which the cup of sorrow is filled, dribble by dribble, for another. Here grief lies in wait; there it seems trying the experiment of how much humanity can bear; into one house it swoops with some tremendous sorrow; into another it creeps little by little, bringing now one ill, now another, till it has accumulated the pyramid of misfortune to a satisfactory height.

And how often we find, also, that just when the poor human bark thinks it is sailing into calm waters, after tossing over rough and dangerous seas, it goes down amongst the breakers. Within sight of the promised harbor, the heart sinks with all its freight of hope, and expectation, and content.

“We have borne so much,” says humanity, “and have

encountered such rough weather, we have bruted so many gales, that no more can fall to our share. The clear sky and the favoring breeze will be with us now to the end." But, even as it says this, the waves are rising and the great deeps of trouble are opening to engulf their prey.

It was thus at any rate with the Molozanes. Never had their prospects seemed so good; never had they felt so thoroughly free from anxiety; never had health been so perfect, nor had happiness been so full as during that autumn, when Louise found herself at last on the direct path into print.

They looked around, and saw no spot in the heavens to cause apprehension. They reflected, and came to the conclusion, that, after long anxiety, after terrible suspense, after brave fighting, they had earned their rest and their sunshine. They listened, and the only tidings of evil that reached their ears seemed so far removed from them, that they never dreamt of connecting it with themselves.

"Mr. Wern is dead," announced Mrs. Elsenham in a severe manner to Beryl. "He died of fever, at Paris, on his way back to England. Ah, Beryl," proceeded the straight-forward old lady, "if you had played your cards well, you might now have been a rich young widow."

And when I say that Beryl refrained from remarking, "It is not everybody who is so lucky as you, grandmamma," the reader will know that the news of Mr. Wern's sudden death did not touch and move her exceedingly.

As her grandmother lamented over the chance she had lost, Beryl's thoughts went away back to that evening, at the Dower House, when amid the roses he pleaded for her love, and pleaded in vain; but they never travelled forward, never connected his death with the events of her own future. And yet, within a fortnight after the news reached England, the first misfortune that had as yet befallen them, came to Stock Orchard Crescent, in shape of an intimation from Mr. Raikes, that on and after the first of December following

the firm of Murphy, Dowsett, and Raikes would not require the services of Mr. Molozane.

"And what their reason can be, what I can possibly have done or undone, I know no more than the babe unborn," remarked the poor gentleman to Mr. George Geith. "Can you guess at all?" he went on; "you know more about business people, and have some idea of their rules of action; as for myself, I am quite at sea, I am bewildered, confounded." And Mr. Molozane looked despairingly out into the old church-yard of St. Gabriel as he spoke.

"Did Mr. Raikes assign no reason for your dismissal?" asked the accountant.

"None whatever; he merely said, 'Mr. Molozane, we propose making some changes in the office, and I regret to have to tell you that in consequence of those changes we shall be unable to retain your services after the first of December.'"

"And you," suggested Mr. Geith.

"I asked him if he had any fault to find with me. 'Fault—not the slightest,' he answered. 'You have been exemplary in your hours, careful in your work, and eager to forward our interests. It will give me the greatest pleasure to see any person you may refer to me. Anything I can do for you, Mr. Molozane, you may rely on;' and with that the interview ended."

"But did you not ask him why he was parting with you?" demanded George, in amazement.

"How could I inquire into their private arrangements?" was Mr. Molozane's reply. "He said they had no fault to find with me; and whether that answer was true or false, I had no alternative but to believe, or seem to believe, his statement."

"I think they had one fault to find with you," remarked George, dryly.

"Fault! what fault?" asked Mr. Molozane, turning from the window.

"You were too dear."

"You mean my salary was too high."

"Precisely," answered the accountant.

"But it has never been increased; and I am surely worth more to them now than I was when I first came to London."

"True, but Mr. Wern was then living."

"What difference could that have made?"

"You will not be offended if I tell you the difference, I think it might make."

"Certainly not. You think perhaps Mr. Raikes fancied he could send them business which would help to pay my salary."

"Perhaps Mr. Raikes did think so; and probably Mr. Wern did put good things in his friend's way; but that is not all I mean. I never thought Murphy's people paid you that sum out of their own pockets. I do believe, Mr. Molozane, your salary was a matter of arrangement between Mr. Raikes and Mr. Wern."

"I never dreamt of such a thing," muttered Mr. Molozane, and he sat down to realize George's idea at his leisure. "If the idea had occurred to me, I would never have gone there, never have accepted the situation."

"Be thankful, then, that it did not occur to you," observed the accountant.

"How could I ascertain if your supposition be correct?" exclaimed the other, vehemently.

"Easily enough," was the reply. "Remark to Mr. Raikes that salary is not so much an object with you, and that a hundred, or a hundred and twenty, would suit you just as well as double that amount;" and George, who had only the very faintest hopes that Mr. Molozane would follow his advice, pulled all the feathers off his red ink pen as he spoke.

"I will do what you tell me," said the other, after a long pause, during which he had been swallowing his pride and looking his position in the face. "I will do what you tell me;" and the result proved that Mr. Geith's supposition had

been correct, for the great firm kept on their clerk, and the changes in the office, so vaguely referred to by Mr. Raikes, were not effected.

Poverty, like sickness, compels men to swallow many a bitter mixture, and Mr. Molozane was obliged to drink this draught in silence. Even to Beryl he never mentioned his suspicions, on the subject of Mr. Wern's generosity. Perforce he had to tell her of the reduction in his salary, but Louise's eager assurances that she would very shortly be able, not merely to make up the deficiency, but to do a great deal more besides, robbed the announcement of half its horror, and the young housekeeper determined to put off the commencement of any fresh economies at any rate until after Christmas.

"I do not care what we have to do without, Louise, if we can only keep things nice for papa," she said.

"And of course we can keep things nice for him, you unbelieving old lady," answered Louise, laughing. "Look at that, Beryl," she added, handing her over a letter the postman had just delivered; "only look at that. Another poem is accepted, and if I or any person authorized by me call at the office of the 'Piccadilly Journal,' I shall receive 'Two pounds three and sevenpence.' And won't I call? Where would I not call if certain of two pounds three and sevenpence for my trouble? Has not the antidote come with the bane this time, Beryl? Is not a better door opened than the one just shut? And have not I done something more at last than spoil paper and waste ink?"

In reply to which question, Beryl, foolish Beryl, sobbed aloud.

"I shall go away this moment and get the money, and spend the odd sevenpence in sweets for my crying baby," continued Louise, whose own eyes were not so dry as they might have been. "Will you come with me? Yes, that's a good child. Run away and put on its bonnet and it shall have lollipops and sugar-candy." And Louise, who had still

a very sincere liking for "sweets" herself, patted her sister on the shoulder with the gravity of a middle-aged matron.

Afterwards, when looking back upon her life, that day always stood out in Beryl's memory separate from its fellows, for it was truly the beginning of her troubles; the last time when with bright face and confident manner Louise spoke of the certainty of success.

It was a day when neither of the girls had any business to be out (Beryl acknowledged her folly before the night was over), cold, damp, and raw, misty overhead, wet underfoot; a day to give coughs and sore throats, to breed fevers, and to befriend doctors; a day the end of which was that, before the next morning, Louise, struggling as one from sleep, thought that some one was holding her fast by the throat, and suffocating her.

Bronchitis was a complaint which Beryl had never seen, and of which she had heard but little, nevertheless she knew quite enough of her sister's constitution to be alarmed at the peculiar noise which accompanied each inspiration, and at Louise's reluctance to try any other than a sitting position.

"I am afraid I am going to be very ill," she said, while her sister had so arranged the pillows that she could lean back against them comfortably. "It is my own fault, I brought it on myself; I got my boots soaked through directly we went out, and I would not tell you because you had wanted me to put on a stronger pair; and I went out feeling the damp go through my bones till I was perished to death; and the cold oil-cloth in that horrible office made me colder still. I will never be stiff and obstinate again, Beryl; I will try to do what you ask, for you have been mother and sister and everything to me, — you have, my darling, you have."

Would she have kept her promise had she lived in great things as in small? God knows. With all her heart and soul Beryl tried, when the hour of trouble came, to feel what she believed, that he had taken her in mercy from the evil to come.



Never had Beryl before so pleaded for any boon to be granted, as she prayed now for Louise to be spared.

From the first, from the moment when Louise woke her in the gray of the winter's morning, a dull presentiment, a sinking fear, had never left her.

When no one else thought the girl so very ill, when even the doctor felt, or at least said he felt, no apprehensions about her, Beryl sat up with her at night, and never left her by day, fighting against death, who was, she firmly believed, only to be driven away by such love and such care as she could give to the sufferer.

How the time passed, how the nights were endured, and the days lived through, Beryl scarcely knew, so long was she in battling against her unseen foe; but at length there came a morning, a dull, wretched November morning, when the doctor, standing in the pretty drawing-room, and looking at Beryl through the light of a yellow fog, said gravely,—

“We have got the bronchitis under at last, Miss Molo-zane, but”——

She knew what was coming, though she had no power to help him finish his sentence. She knew the worst that was coming, yet still so long as it was merely coming, it did not seem like reality.

“She has never been strong, as I understood you to say,” went on the doctor, “and I greatly fear that she never will be very strong again. My dear young lady, calm yourself. Pray, be calm.”

“What do you mean?” asked Beryl, the tears streaming down her white cheeks, as she asked the question: “Is it to be life or death for my sister? Is she ever to rise again — or”——

Something came across the girl as she said that “or,” which prevented her uttering another word.

It was to be death, and she realized the fact. They were to fight a little longer with the dire phantom that had been haunting her. They were to have further advice. Doctors

were to hold consultations. More remedies were to be tried. More days and more nights were to be got through, as such days and nights may ; but the end after all was to be the same — Death.

Death to love, to hope, to all the sweet home ties, to all the pleasant plans sketched out in the glowing firelight. No more life, no more labor, no more striving, no more success. Beryl grasped the full extent of their wretchedness in a moment, as she stood looking at the doctor, reading the still unspoken sentence in his face.

“ And how I ever am to break it to papa, I do not know,” she moaned out to George Geith, who came in immediately after the doctor’s departure. “ How he is to be told, I cannot imagine. When Olivia died, Tilly thought he never would have got over it ; and then we were at the Park, and she died at home, and now — and now ” ——

Beryl could tell no more about it. She felt in a vague kind of way that it would have been easier for her to part with Louise at the Park, or the Dower House, than to lose her in the midst of the hurry and din of London.

The tremendous loneliness and desolation of a great city, a loneliness never felt till health and strength are going, and death is tremblingly expected in the house, filled Beryl’s cup of sorrow to overflowing.

If she could have taken her darling home. If she could have watched her falling into the long sleep, which knows no waking, in the familiar room, the poor child thought the trouble would have been more tolerable ; but, as it was, Beryl did not even make an attempt to fight with her sorrow, but rather resting her aching head on her arms, which she had cast wearily on the table, she cried to her heart’s content, George never hindering her.

What he could then have given to have spoken of his love before this trouble came upon her ! what he would have given to possess a right to take her in his arms and kiss away her tears and comfort her in this great distress ! But it was

too late for him now to remedy his over-caution, and accordingly he sat silent till her grief should have expended itself, for he knew no form of words, no manner of speech, which could touch a sorrow like this.

It was in the dining-room they sat ; Beryl had taken him in there so that her sister, who lay in the front bedchamber, should not hear their voices ; and now George, looking out into that dreary little garden, all bare of flowers, unconsciously photographed for himself the scene and its accessories.

The dead, blank wall, up which Beryl had tried to coax ivy, a virginian creeper, and the fast-growing wisteria ; the backs of the houses in the Caledonian Road ; the small grass-plot, looking muddy and sodden in the mist of the November day ; Guess, sitting in the middle of the plot on his hind legs, vainly endeavoring to win some sign of recognition from the window ; Royal, in his kennel, lying there with his tail out, and his nose in the farthest corner of his house, where he was privately gnawing a bone.

The great, bushy tail kept slowly wagging to and fro, sweeping the wet gravel from side to side, and whenever Guess dropped from his begging posture he turned a longing look towards the retriever, whose labors he would willingly have shared.

From the street came the echoes of "All is Lost," which a barrel-organ was droning out ; from the kitchen ascended in shrill treble, —

" I have come from a happy land,  
Where care is unknown."

And to this organ and to the song, like a dull, monotonous accompaniment, Beryl's sobs rose and fell, rose and fell mournfully.

" I did not think this would have been the end of it all, Mr. Geith," she lifted her head at last to say ; " it seems so hard ; it seems so hard ;" and the girl covered her face with her hands once more, while George tried, with unsteady voice, to tell her something of God's ways not being as our

ways, of His taking oftentimes the youngest and best beloved soonest to Himself.

"But He might have left us Louey," Beryl persisted; and that was all the impression made by George's little sermon — a sermon he had then no heart to repeat.

After a time, too, he found that it was needful he should preach patience and submission to himself, for he saw so much of Louise during her illness, he grew so fond of her, that at last he found, next to Beryl, he never had loved anything before to the same extent.

Dying, her greatest pleasure was to talk of the happy life hers had been — of the flowers and the fields, and the trees, she was to see on earth no more.

It seemed to ease her pain, it appeared to while away the weary hours of sickness, for her to speak of that dear old home in Hertfordshire to her sympathetic listeners. With the winter's darkness outside, the house, with the shadows of death deepening within, she yet could see the summer glory bathing the far-off landscape; could lie in the bed from which she was never more to rise, and behold the sun steeping the familiar woods in floods of golden light.

Beryl and home! While she had strength left to speak, it was of her sister and her birthplace she talked.

"From the time I can remember anything, I never recollect Beryl being cross to me. When we used to be rolling our hoops, she let hers go down constantly, because I cried if she ran on faster than I. She was always the same as you have known her, Mr. Geith. If ever any one of us gave up an amusement, that one was always Beryl. No matter how tired she might be, she would run to get what papa wanted; or she would read to him, or sew for us. I dare say many girls have done greater things, have had the opportunity of making martyrs or heroines of themselves, but I do not think any girl or any woman ever thought so little of herself and so much of other people as Beryl. It seems to me now," she went on, "as if I never had loved

her half enough. It was not my fault, but I could break my heart at times thinking how it never was large enough to hold all the love she deserved."

So Louise would murmur, in her low, weak voice, which was never to be stronger in this world, never, while George Geith listened, as a man was likely to listen to and talk about the only woman on earth he loved.

It was a pitiful death-bed, pitiful because of her quiet resignation, of her childlike acquiescence in the fiat that had gone forth, of her love for father and sister, of her plaintive regret that she was not allowed to stay and do something for them, of the thorough enjoyment she had taken out of life, of the sweet, sorrowful memories she cherished of the distant country fields and hedgerows, which she was to gaze on no more.

She took it all so calmly herself, that, but that they knew for certain they were losing her, it would not have seemed to the father and sister like death. Down the river she glided, without cry, without struggle, without lamentation, and they, walking on the bank, talked to her as she floated away.

During the first portion of her illness, Louise's pleasure was to lie turning over the only money she had ever earned, and calculating how soon she would be able to work again, and make enough to defray all the expense she was causing; but towards the end, when recovery seemed even to her impossible, she laid by the business, and the pleasure, and the toys of life without a murmur, and settled herself down to sleep at the bidding of her Almighty Father, as she might have done in her mother's arms.

Whilst for Beryl? All the other troubles she had met were as nothing to this. Matilda's marriage, the loss of the Park, poverty, anxiety, seemed now such trifles that the girl wondered she had ever fretted because of them.

• Human pity seemed so unmeaning, human help so useless, human consolation such a mockery, her own poor

strength such weakness, that Beryl must have sunk under the trial but that God had mercy on her, and out of her love extracted the power which enabled her to attend to the invalid, and comfort her father without faltering by the way.

But for this, Beryl could scarcely have endured her misery. Friends came to her, but what could friends do when Louey was dying?

She would rather Matilda, and Matilda's carriage, and Matilda's husband, had kept away from the house of mourning. Mrs. Elsenham's footman, in his resplendent livery, daily irritated her by useless inquiries. And regularly as clockwork came the Bemmidges, whom Beryl often wished a thousand miles away.

Mrs. Gilling likewise paid many visits to Stock Orchard Crescent at this juncture, offering to read to Louise, and to bring her favorite minister with her; but Beryl declined both offers, saying, —

“Our clergyman is very kind to her, and she likes him greatly; and I — I read to her myself, Mrs. Gilling, when I am able.”

When she was able!

Poor child! No one ever knew how, through the long, long days and nights, she forced herself to be able to do whatsoever her sister wished. How she listened to Louise's talk about their old home without weeping. How she kept the tears out of her voice as she read. How she sat quiet, thinking silently, whilst the dying girl slept. How she was at this juncture, more than at any former period of her life, the stay and support of those about her.

Towards the last, Louise began to wander in her talk, and then those who loved her best knew that her short earthly day was drawing to its close. Over that close there fell no mist, no gloom, no darkness. All the time she had lived in London seemed blotted out from her memory, for she never spoke of the hopes and fears that had dwelt with her there, but was always muttering some sentence about the Park or the Dower House.

And the last words she whispered, with her head on her sister's shoulder, were, —

“I think I have looked at that sunset until I am tired, Beryl. Take me home.”

Then the Lord God Almighty, hearing that pitiful supplication, took her out of Beryl's arms home to that City, whose maker and builder He is.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

## DEFEATED.

FROM the day of Louise's death Mr. Molozane never held up his head. When, after the funeral, he left the lonely Hertfordshire church-yard, where they laid her, it was to return to London a changed and broken man.

Like Jacob of old, "bereaved of his children, he was bereaved." And though he went for a time about his former avocations, though he resumed his place in Leadenhall Street, and discharged the duties of his position with as much exactness as ever, still he held on his way, but as a man may run on for a time after receiving his death-wound.

Thinking of the day when he first entered his office in Fen Court, George Geith found it hard to associate that Mr. Molozane, who now crept up the passage after business hours, with the stately country gentleman who had once shaken hands with the accountant only because the accountant declined to accept his fee.

"Whenever I can find an opportunity, I will delay no longer," thought Mr. Geith. "I must do something for that poor old man, and I must see if my darling will give me a right to comfort and protect her. Oh! Beryl, I wish to God I had asked you to be my wife in the old days that can never come back again. I think you would have had me, my own love. I think you would."

And George Geith, leaning his forehead against the mantelpiece, thought, as we have all thought some time or other, about what "might have been."



Had Beryl married him, had they all lived together, had he taken Mr. Molozane into his own office, had he been less careful for her, less cautious for himself, might Louise not have been occupying her old familiar place? might not this trouble have been averted? this life spared?

God help us! How late it is in life before we come thoroughly to understand, that, though we may choose our paths, still it is He who directs our steps!

Here was a man, not young, not inexperienced, still thinking about life and death, joy and sorrow, as though these things had lain in the hollow of his hand, to be dealt out at his pleasure.

Here he stood in the room, which is to this hour but little changed since he tenanted it, repenting over that which he considered an error of judgment in the past, whilst he had no prevision of what the future was bringing towards him.

In the future, he would repair his error, he considered. He would speak to Mr. Molozane; he would strive to ascertain Beryl's feelings towards him — and then? Why, then he would arrange his plans accordingly. So he decided, all unconscious that his plans were being arranged without his help.

One morning, in the early part of February, when Fen Court looked its dreariest, the dismal church-yard its saddest, he received a note from Beryl Molozane, stating that her father was not well; that he was unable to go to town; that she, Beryl, did not like his appearance, though the doctor said there was not much the matter with him. "I wish," she finished, "you would get one of the best physicians you can hear of to come and see him. After Louise" — and then she seemed to have paused before proceeding, "it is natural I should like to have the best advice at first."

It was so natural, that George Geith left all his other business to attend to hers. He went to Orchard Crescent with a physician who charged five guineas for the journey, and who would have been worth four times the money had

the disease happened to be one which human skill or human kindness could touch.

"I may speak frankly to you," he said to George Geith, as they drove together down the Caledonian Road. "There is no hope. Years ago, I might have done something; but it is too late now; though the pain may be palliated, the progress of the malady cannot be stopped. It would be false kindness to deceive his family, though I could not help deceiving the poor girl whose life seems bound up in his. There is no chance of recovery."

"How long?" George asked.

"He cannot live three months," was the reply.

"You are certain there can be no mistake? the doctor who is attending him said distinctly there was no cause for alarm."

"The doctor who is attending him may say what he pleases," answered the great man, a little nettled; "but he knows as well what is the matter as I do. The medicine he is sending is precisely what I should prescribe myself — a palliative — and our profession do not use palliatives until remedies are considered useless."

"Would you be so kind as to set me down here," was all the comment the accountant made on this piece of information.

He had been deciding on his own course of action, and now wanted to get back to the city to perfect it.

If Mr. Molozane was dying, every moment was of importance; if Beryl was likely to lose her only natural protector within so short a period, the sooner he spoke to her father the better. All the way to the city, through the wretched lanes of Clerkenwell, along Fore Street, and London Wall, down Moorgate Street, across Lothbury and the Royal Exchange, up Cornhill, through Leadenhall Market to Lime Street, and thence to Fen Court, the accountant thought of nothing save Mr. Molozane and Mr. Molozane's daughter.

“ I will do what I can this afternoon,” he said to himself, “ and get up there as early as possible this evening. I will know the best or the worst now ;” and he passed into Fen Court as he mentally uttered his decision.

Turning sharply up the passage, he ran against Mr. Bemmidge.

“ I am so thankful you have come back, Geith. I have been waiting for you these two hours. I could not think where the devil you had got to.

“ There is a run on Norton’s, and remembering your £500, I ” ——

Mr. Bemmidge never was suffered to finish that sentence. What he did or said in answer, George Geith could not in after-days recollect himself ; and even Mr. Bemmidge could only dimly recall being pushed aside by the accountant, who ran up the passage, mounted the stairs leading to his office, half-a-dozen steps at a time, seized the paper he wanted, and then rushed down-stairs again, through the passage and along Fenchurch Street like a maniac.

Vainly Mr. Bemmidge tried to overtake him. Regardless of danger, George left the crowded side-paths, and keeping in the horse-roads, dashed among omnibuses, held on by cabs and crossed in the very teeth of lumbering vans as though he bore a charmed life. Never a thief fled faster from justice than did this man to rescue his all from the ruins.

He could not have done it for a wager. Women and children scattered out of his way. Drivers pulled aside to let him pass. Seeing him run, a score of people soon followed in pursuit, but he outstripped them all. A cry was raised of “ stop him,” but the passers-by might as well have tried to stop the Thames.

Across Gracechurch Street, along Lombard Street, through the passage by the post-office, over King William Street, round the corner of St. Swithin’s Lane into George Street, thence past the back of the Mansion House into Bucklersbury, when his journey was almost ended.

Panting, struggling, pushing, cursing, he forced his way into Norton's, where he flung his check on the counter, and with the perspiration streaming from his face, waited for payment.

His check was for ten thousand pounds, and one of the clerks, an elderly man, who wore spectacles, and whose hands trembled as if he had the ague, began paying him in sixpences.

"Thirty-six, thirty-seven, thirty-eight, thirty-nine, one pound nineteen and sixpence, sir. That is all I have. The bank has stopped payment."

With an oath George pushed the money back across the counter, and the sixpences fell over the other side, where they rolled about the floor. He snatched up the check, and tearing it to bits, stamped on the fragments with his muddy boots, and then he turned and left the place through a passage cleared for him by the crowd, whose clamor had been silenced for a moment by a trouble which was greater, an excitement that was fiercer, than their own.

To George Geith, Norton's failure was simply ruin: it frustrated every plan of his life; it strangled every hope he had cherished; and when he walked out of the bank and turned down Size Lane, it may surely be pardoned him that he cursed the day when he ever set foot in the place.

He did not speak curses, but he thought them; he made no outward sign, but he mentally read a whole Commination Service over the heads of the firm, and hurled anathemas at them.

His money had been shared amongst earlier claimants; his money paid in not three days before; his money that he had toiled for, struggled for, worked early and late to gain; spent health and strength and the best years of his life to secure.

His, and yet not his. If that money which he had just seen swept away had been his own, his very own, the accountant's heart would not have stood still at the thought of failure, defeat, and ruin, as it did.

It was his, because out of what was his he should have to make it good; yet in another way it was not his, but trust-money, which he should have to replace within a week at the latest.

He had believed Norton's bank to be as safe as the Bank of England, and behold! his belief had ruined him.

He would have to commence again. Ten years older in age, and twenty years older in constitution, he would have to begin at the beginning once more, and toil wearily up towards success.

If Norton's had stopped payment at any other time, if it had been any week in the year but that week, his balance would have been smaller, and he could have faced his loss with equanimity; but now, with that enormous sum to replace, he must raise money at any cost, get in his capital at any sacrifice.

And even at this price, could he make good the loss? Staggering down Size Lane, with his hat pulled over his brows, stumbling at every step as if he were drunk, clutching at the door-posts and the window-sills for support as he passed by, George asked himself this question, —

How, too, about Beryl? He must give her up; he must never think more about marrying her; he must relinquish all his dreams of a sunny, happy home.

He had planted his flowers too soon, and they were dead; a single frost having nipped and killed them, every one.

The garden of his life was bare; it was all winter to him now, winter without the hope of spring.

Everything he had longed for was now out of his reach forever. Everything lovely, and loving, and fair was swept away from his existence, and he should have to pursue his onward path in a darkness like unto the darkness of the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

If he could die; if he could but die and be done with it, with the long struggle, the weary toil, the pain, the fever, the sorrow, he felt he should be thankful to God for the relief.

And as he thought this, leaning against the wall of St. Antholine's Church the while for support, a faintness like death came over him ; the lights flickered and swam before his eyes ; the wet, sloppy streets and the dull leaden sky alike faded from his sight ; and George Geith dropped in a heap on the pavement in the midst of the passers-by.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BARONET AND ACCOUNTANT.

WHEN George Geith awoke to consciousness, he found himself lying in a strange bed, in an unfamiliar room, with Andrew Bembridge standing on one side of him and a doctor on the other.

“Where am I? have I been ill? what has happened?” asked the accountant, faintly; but he remembered what had happened before his friend could answer, and said, “I recollect — Norton’s. How long have I been here?”

“Only a few hours. I brought you straight here in a cab.”

“This is the evening of the same day, then,” remarked the accountant.

“My dear sir, you must not talk,” here interposed the doctor.

“I must get up at once, at any rate,” answered George.

“Not if you value your life,” was the reply.

“I do not value my life at all,” said the accountant, and he raised himself up in bed as he spoke, only to fall back again the next moment, weak and helpless, on the pillow.

“You have beaten me this time, doctor, I believe,” he remarked, with a forced laugh. “If I obey your orders, and throw myself on your mercy, how long will it take you to set me up? When can I go to the City?”

“Not for three days, at the soonest,” was the reply, which caused the patient to groan aloud.

"For Heaven's sake, keep yourself quiet," advised Mr. Bemmidge, "and all will yet come straight."

"Much you know about it," snapped the accountant, savagely. And who may reprove him for his incivility?

"What amount are you in for?" asked his friend, while the doctor, whose curiosity was excited, refrained from crying out, "Silence."

"Ten thousand five hundred and odd."

"Good God! what could induce you to keep such a balance?"

"The devil," answered George, and he turned on his pillow angrily.

"There is no use in crying over spilt milk," he went on, after a pause; "the shock seems to have floored me for the time being; it was enough to floor any man. But all I want or ask now is strength to get up and see to my business as soon as may be. So, whatever you, sir," turning to the doctor, "tell me to do, that I will try to do."

"Lie still, do not talk, do not think, if you can help it, take the medicine I shall send regularly, and as much nourishment as you can swallow."

"Very good," acquiesced George. "Anything else?"

"Nothing, except to get a sound night's sleep if possible;" and with this advice the doctor departed, to have his place supplied by Mrs. Bemmidge and Mrs. Gilling, the latter of whom announced her intention of watching beside Mr. Geith, in case any unfavorable change should occur before morning.

It was all in vain that George protested he should sleep, that he should require nothing, that he was perfectly certain there could exist no necessity for any one's rest being disturbed on his account. Mrs. Gilling was resolute, and eventually took up her position before the fire, arrayed in such fearful garments as George had never previously fancied could be worn by woman.

It proved quite a mistake to suppose Mrs. Gilling was the



watcher; at a very early period she fell off to sleep, leaving the invalid to see that her dark lilac dressing-gown, the frills of the capes whereof might have been judiciously added to the length, did not get drawn into the fire, and that no part of the lace on her night-cap was set ablaze by the candles.

How she snored! Lying awake, counting the hours as they passed slowly by, George Geith, listening to her alternately grunting, snorting, gasping, moaning, and holding her breath, found time, in the midst of his own anxieties, to bestow sincere pity on the defunct Mr. Gilling.

"It is no wonder he died," thought the accountant; "the only marvel is, he was not hanged;" and then his mind reverted to his own affairs, and George Geith ransacked his brain to find some means of escape, to devise some way of extricating himself from his difficulties.

"Would Mark help him? could he, if he would? And if he could and would, how might his cousin reply to him, after the way in which he had rejected help in the days gone by?"

"Did his promise to his mother bind him still? had she any right to exact such a promise?" these were the thoughts that chased one another through his mind; "if she were living, would she not release him? Was it fair or expedient for one person to claim an unconditional promise from another, and in this changeable life was it justifiable for any man to give that unconditional promise and adhere to it?"

Ought not every soul to be permitted to go free and unfettered through life? ought he not to have been told the reason, when he was bound by the promise? Probably the reasons had vanished long since; most likely his mother would absolve him were she living. In all lives there comes a point where each individual must free himself from control, and act irrespective of the wishes and opinions of others. Had not that time come to him?

With the whole of his future happiness at stake, with

Beryl's happiness, most probably, likewise trembling in the balance, with his own health broken, with the best working part of his life past, should he not be justified in deciding he had kept his word long enough, in claiming, after all these weary years of toil, temporary help, temporal salvation, at the hands of his nearest of kin?

All the night long, whilst the fire first blazed cheerfully, then fell smouldering together, then died out, whilst the candles burnt lower and lower, till, without a helping hand, they expired in the midst of a final illumination, whilst Mrs. Gilling slept the sleep of the righteous, George Geith argued the question with himself.

He was reluctant to do wrong; but who may say that he was not placed in a difficult dilemma as to what was right?

For, although there may be a doubt as to the circumstances under which a dying person may strive to exact a promise, there can be no doubt but that the living are not, under any circumstances, justified in giving one; and if they be not justified in giving one, are they right to keep it inviolate once it is given?

Cannot we fancy the dead themselves mourning over their folly in taking the part of the Omniscient, and saying in their finite wisdom, or their short-sighted love, "Thou shalt not," or "Thou shalt," for all time, and, so far as we can see, for all eternity also.

Did he err greatly in deciding that it would be well for him to break his word at last? that word which he had kept intact through sorrow, and temptation, and despair.

God knows, it is not for us to judge. All I can tell is how the man whose life's story I have told, so far determined, ere he fell asleep.

He made up his mind to apply to Sir Mark for help. Toil, and disappointment, and love had, for the time being, taken all pride and all obstinacy out of his nature; and having formed this plan, which would, he thought, relieve him from present difficulties, he fell, as Mrs. Gilling phrased it, into a "beautiful slumber."

"He has slept all night like an infant," said that charming old lady, and she really believed the truth of her own statement. "It would be worth your while, girls," she added, addressing Mrs. Bemmidge and Miss Gilling, "to take a peep at him; I am sure I never saw a grown-up person sleeping so like a child before."

With becoming modesty Miss Gilling stole into the room on tiptoe after her married sister, to see the phenomenon Mrs. Gilling had described.

"Lor', how beautiful," said Gertrude, with uplifted hands, "I declare I never thought Mr. Geith handsome before;" and then Mr. Bemmidge and mamma's queen were likewise introduced into the room to view the sick man's slumbers.

"Poor fellow," muttered Andrew Bemmidge, as he stole from the chamber, "he won't look so happy when he awakens. I wish my tongue had been cut out before I had mentioned Norton's to him;" and if Mr. Bemmidge was a little extravagant in his wish, he was perfectly sincere in his sorrow. Had he owned ten thousand pounds, there is not the slightest doubt but that he would have thrust the whole sum into George's hands in the excess of his needless remorse and self-reproach.

Never a truer friend existed than Mr. Bemmidge; and though he had a hundred things to attend to of his own, he would not stir a step out of the house till Mr. Geith awoke, in case he should want him to attend to any business in the City.

"I should like to write a note," said George, in answer to Mr. Bemmidge's inquiries, which were made whilst the accountant sat, propped up with pillows, eating his breakfast; "and I wish you would get it sent up at once to Halkin Street. You might tell Foss to take it; and if Sir Mark be not there, let him inquire where he is, and then tell him to come back to me."

"Is this gentleman any relation of yours?" ventured

Mr. Bemmidge, after George had written his note, and given it to him. "I see he is of the same name."

"He is my cousin," answered the accountant; and Mr. Bemmidge went down-stairs to convey this pleasing intelligence to the female portion of his household.

"Oh! Lor', how strange!" exclaimed Miss Gilling. "I should not be surprised, mar, if Sir Mark came to see Mr. Geith at once. I shall go straight away home and put on my blue silk, and I should advise you, Sophy, to have the dear children nicely dressed. Oh, Andrew, how I wish I knew what was in the note! I wonder if he says anything about mar sitting up with him. I think it very likely, don't you?"

If Miss Gilling had read what George's note contained, she might have been slightly disappointed to learn that he had found something to write about other than her mamma's polite attention.

"DEAR MARK (it began),— Do you remember, years ago, offering me help—money help I mean—and my refusing it? Well, I have been thrown at last, and am badly crippled by the fall. Norton's stoppage has ruined me. Can you assist me with £10,000, or a part of it, and oblige your cousin  
GEORGE?"

To which epistle Mr. Foss brought back, in due course, the following reply scrawled in pencil:

"I wish I could help you, old fellow, and you should soon be off the ground; but the fact is, I am so infernally hard run myself, that I have not at this minute got £50 of ready money in the world. I shall come over to see you as soon as I am dressed. I wish I could help you, on my honor I do.  
MARK."

"Confound your wishes, and your honor too," exclaimed

George Geith, as he made a ball of the note, and flung it with all his force into the fire, to the great amazement of Mr. Foss, who had been wonderfully taken by the baronet's free-and-easy manner, and by the way in which he had been introduced into that gentleman's bedroom, to tell him all he knew about George's misfortune.

"And he would insist on my having lunch, spite of everything I could say," Mr. Foss subsequently informed the ladies; "and while I was eating it, my lady came down to hear what was the matter, too. Such a beauty, Gertrude! and to listen to her, one might have thought Mr. Geith was her brother. She cried till her eyes were quite red, when I told her about his falling down in the street.

"Oh! what will aunt say? Oh! what will his aunt say?" she kept repeating. "We dare not tell her, for she would never forgive Mark, never." Then on the top of that she said she would start off by herself to him, and get the money her cousin wanted from Lady Geith; that is Sir Mark's mother, you understand. I do not think she knew her own mind two minutes together, and I am sure I could not make sense out of the tenth part of what she said. But they were both very sorry, there could be no doubt about that.

"I wonder," added Mr. Foss, impressively, "I wonder how the devil a cousin of Sir Mark Geith's, and a cousin so well liked, too, ever came to be an accountant in Fen Court?"

"Do not swear, 'Enery," said Mrs. Gilling.

"You should hear Mr. Geith, ma'am. I learnt it off him," was the answer. Whereupon Mrs. Bemmidge exclaimed, "Oh, fie!" and Miss Gilling tittered.

"And for that matter, too," went on Mr. Foss, who had found the Halkin Street wine of the strongest, "you should hear Sir Mark. I am sure, if oaths could have sent Norton's head off, it would not be now on his shoulders."

"Is he coming here? are you sure he said he was coming

here?" asked Miss Gilling, walking to and from the window in a flutter of anxious expectation.

"Certain and positive. He made me write him down the address, and ring the bell and order his horses; and then he said, if that d——d groom of his was sharp, he should be at Holloway before me; but you see he was n't, after all."

"Was n't, after all," repeated mamma's queen with a lisp, whereupon Mr. Foss swung her round and round the room, and finally planted her on the sofa in solitary state.

"He is here," said Mrs. Gilling, solemnly, as Mr. Foss was remarking he must be off again for the city, and a hush fell on the party while Sir Mark's knock resounded through the house, — "he is here;" and had the baronet's mind been more at ease, he would have been amused at the trio of courtesies which greeted his entrance into the room.

"How do again?" he said, turning to Mr. Foss, after duly acknowledging the ladies' politeness. "You have been quicker than I expected; but one can't ride fast over the stones. Can I see my cousin? Is he awake?"

Mrs. Bembridge believed he was; Miss Gilling put her hand on one shoulder, and tried to look sentimental, whilst Mrs. Gilling assumed her blandest smile, and requested Mr. Foss to "conduct Sir Mark to Mr. Geith's apartment."

"Thank you," said the baronet, and he turned the handle and reclosed the door for himself.

"George, what is it?" he asked, sitting down on the bed, and taking his cousin's hand in his.

"Only that I am ruined," was the reply; and George drew his hand away again.

"You have a right to be angry with me," said the baronet. "You may reproach me as much as you like, and I shall never cry, Hold. I ought not to have cut off that entail — I admit it; but it has been as bad for me as for you. It has, indeed."

"I can hardly see that," answered George, coldly, "for you have had your cake and eaten it, while I have never even seen mine."

"You have not had my anxieties, though," returned Sir Mark. "What with seeing the money flying uselessly; what with the dread of my mother hearing about the entail; what with the thought of you, and the fear of losing Snareham, my life has been a hell, George, a perfect hell."

"You made it so for yourself, then," replied the accountant, "for never a man started in life with fairer prospects, with greater chances of happiness, than yourself. But this talk can do no good to either of us, Mark. Let us speak of something else. How is your wife?"

"She is quite well, and so are my children — two daughters."

"No son?" The question was put with a certain interest.

"None; and," added Sir Mark, hastily, "if you do not know it already, you are now the next heir, for uncle Arthur is dead."

"I am the next heir to what?" asked George, with a sneer. "Do you mean to beggary? for that, it seems, is about all which is now left to me."

"I swear to you," cried Sir Mark, "I will live economically for the future; I will go abroad, where we can reduce our expenses at once. We will settle at some place near my mother, and" —

"Get her to leave her money to you, so that you may fling that also to the dogs," interrupted the accountant, bitterly. "No, Mark, do not deceive yourself; you will never retrench, so long as you have sixpence you will spend half-a-crown. Snareham will never be worth that," said George, snapping his fingers, "to any Geith again, and lying here a ruined man, you can scarcely expect him to say, 'I forgive you for having taken my last chance of wealth or position away forever.'"

"I will make what reparation I can," said Sir Mark, meekly. "I will go to my mother, I will tell her all, I will ask her for money for you now, I will entreat her to leave

everything to you when she dies, I will sell Snareham, and live on the surplus that remains after paying my debts, and if that should not support us, I will work."

With some difficulty the accountant raised himself on his elbow, and surveyed his cousin from head to foot.

"You look like a man to work, I must say," he remarked, after this scrutiny; "and, farther," he added, with a weary sigh, as he lay down again, "I do not know that, after my own experience, I should advise any one to work who can sit idle. It is as profitable to play for nothing as to work for nothing."

There was a silence for a minute after this, a silence which Sir Mark broke by saying, —

"Tell me what I can do for you, George, in this matter, and there is my hand, that, at any cost, at any sacrifice to myself, I will help you. Money I have not, money I cannot raise, but my mother has plenty, and she would give it to you in a moment. I will go to her, if you like; I will start to-night, if you only say the word."

"Thank you, Mark, I think you would," said the other, touched in spite of himself; "but by the time you returned from Nice it would be all up with me. It is trust-money that is gone, it is trust-money I must replace at once. Had it not been that the blow stunned me so confoundedly, I should not have applied to you. As it is, there is another man who can, I think, and will, help me out of this hole. Once out of it, I will take good care never to get into such a mess again."

"Will you not let me go to my mother, then?" asked the baronet.

"No," answered George Geith. "No," he repeated more firmly, after a moment's deliberation; "I will not come between you and your mother, Mark. I have worked, and can work again; you have never worked, and could not do it if you tried. But, I'll tell you what," went on the accountant, when he had paused and thought over what he



was going to say, "you shall promise me to make another effort to keep Snareham. Do not let the Jews have it, even though it be encumbered. Come to me when I have my wits about me again, and let us see if the old place cannot be cleared yet. For the sake of your wife, for the sake of your children, Mark, make one effort more."

And George Geith put out his hand, that true right hand which had worked so long, and so well, and laid it on his cousin's as he spoke.

It took a good deal to move the baronet's composure, but his voice shook as he answered, —

"I will do what you ask me, George. Yes, I will come and show you all, but I am afraid it is too late — too late."

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## RESIGNED.

WHILST talking to his cousin, it had occurred to George, that possibly Mr. Tettin might be both able and willing to render him the assistance he required, and he accordingly asked the baronet to see that gentleman, and ask him to visit Ivy Cottage.

“As I dare say you have not much to do, Mark, you might offer to drive him over,” suggested the accountant. “He would come all the quicker, and, most probably, all the more readily too.”

“I rode here,” was the reply, “but I will call with him on my way back, and send Kailes on for the carriage. Good-bye, old fellow ; *au revoir*.”

And with this, Sir Mark left the room, and mounted his horse, and rode down the Holloway Road, and up the Camden Road at a hard gallop. Up the hill past the prison, down the hill near the railway bridge, Sir Mark never slackened his pace.

It was not until he got on the stones that he pulled his steed up to a walk ; and he would not have walked then, but that, like all good riders, he was careful of his horses, and solicitous for the safety of their knees.

If he was fast, however, Mr. Tettin was slow ; he had clients to see, he had papers to make up, he had letters to write ; and it was therefore quite dark before Sir Mark's carriage stopped at Mr. Bemmidge's garden-gate.

“I will not get out,” remarked the baronet. “No doubt

my cousin will like best to see you alone ;” which was the more considerate of Sir Mark as he shrewdly conjectured there was some secret lying between the accountant and the solicitor, a secret he would dearly have loved to know.

That there had once been such a secret, the reader is already aware ; but on the present occasion, neither Mr. Tettin nor Mr. Geith made any allusion to it.

George confined himself to a bare statement of his affairs, of his liabilities and his resources. Mr. Tettin confined himself to listening, so that the conversation could not have proved particularly amusing or instructive to a third person, had a third person been present.

“Of course it is ruin anyhow you take it,” said the accountant, when he had finished his explanation ; “but there are various ways of being ruined ; and for my part, I prefer going back to the beginning and commencing *de nouveau*, rather than having a meeting of creditors, or asking favors from any one. If I can but gain time to realize without a loss, I can pay twenty shillings, and perhaps have something left beside ; but if I cannot get time, I must go through the court. Even had I been able to get about, I could not gather ten thousand pounds together at an hour’s notice ; and as I am, I can do nothing. Perhaps I may be up to-morrow, and in the city the next day ; but even so” —

“Don’t attempt it ;” Mr. Tettin replied, laying his hand on the sick man’s shoulder. “Don’t attempt it ; lie still and leave all to me ; I’ll see you through it, my boy, never fear.”

And he departed, leaving George in a state of bewilderment, partly at the deliverance which had been wrought for him, and greatly at Mr. Tettin’s extremely easy style of address ; but he need not have been surprised at the lawyer’s solemnity being disturbed for once. Never had Mr. Tettin seen a man fight before like the accountant ; never had he beheld such an unequal contest waged successfully as George Geith had carried on for years ; never had he been so im-

pressed with the energy and force of will of any human being as by the indomitable perseverance and power of endurance possessed by this man, who was now lying crushed, and maimed, and helpless; beggared, through no fault or imprudence of his own.

Next day Sir Mark rode over to urge his cousin to come at once to Halkin Street. "Cissy will be enchanted," said the good-natured baronet. "I do not know anything we should both like better than having the nursing of you. And though I do not mean to say but that your friends here seem devilishly good kind of people, and careful of you and all that, still they are not exactly — you know what I mean, George, don't you?"

"They do well enough for me, if that is what you mean," answered George, in his old defiant independence of manner. "They have been very good to me, and I am very grateful to them for their kindness."

"Of course you are, and so you ought to be; and I am very grateful for their care of you too. I should like to be able to do something for them in return. Is not the husband a wine-merchant? shall I send him an order for half a dozen butts?"

"Do not, Mark; do not, for Heaven's sake!" said his cousin, earnestly; "the man is poor, and it would ruin him to be kept out of his money as long as you would keep him out of it."

"Well thought of, George," answered the baronet, laughing, even whilst he winced. "Shall I ask my mother to order it, then? she would do it if I said he had been kind to you."

"She would have to know how he had been kind," remarked George, "and that would involve telling her about Norton's, which misfortune I think we had best make no mention of."

"What a long-headed fellow you are," said the baronet; "but all this is beside the question. Will you come and stay

with us? Will you let me take you back to Halkin Street to-morrow?"

"When I am able to go to Halkin Street, I shall be able to go to Fen Court," answered the accountant, "and I had rather get back to my work, thank you, Mark, than think about paying visits."

"There is no little *tendresse* keeping you here, George, is there?" asked his cousin; "that young lady down-stairs seems very much interested in your recovery, and so forth."

"That young lady down-stairs is, so far as I know, going to marry my clerk," George replied; "as for me, I shall never marry anybody now, Mark. Norton's stoppage has settled."

"Should you have married, but for that?" said Sir Mark, compassionately, as his cousin paused and hesitated.

"I hoped I should," was the answer, "but that hope is dead forever now;" and George, who could have borne all other questions save this, philosophically broke down at the thought of Beryl, and turned aside to hide how the topic affected him.

"George," said the baronet, pausing after he had walked two or three times up and down the room. "George, nothing shall prevent my going to Nice and laying the state of your affairs before my mother. Every hope of your life shall not be sacrificed to me. If money can give you happiness, money you shall have."

"No, Mark, not at that price; I could not take such a sum of money as a gift. I would not now be hampered by it as a loan. As for her"—— George proceeded with a tremor in his voice, "she never knew how I loved her, and she never shall; and in the years to come, when she is married to some rich man, and is a happy wife, and has her children all about her, she will never imagine how a poor accountant in the city was once nearly breaking his heart for her sake."

"But George, *dear* George," — and Sir Mark grew quite pathetic in his sympathy.

“I tell you it is of no use arguing with me,” said his cousin, almost fiercely. “I was mad ever to think of it, mad to dream of dragging her down to my level. I was made to work, and I will think and dream no more.”

And with that the accountant closed the conversation and laid by his love. In the most secret chamber of his heart he stored it away, in the most remote corner of his existence, separate and apart from all the cares and sorrows of his life, he placed the memory of Beryl Molozane.

As we lay a rose in our drawer, and find that every paper it contains is impregnated with the odor, so this love died, and, hopeless though it might be, seemed to fill George Geith's existence with something it had always lacked before.

For her dear sake it was useless for him ever again to toil, to save, to speculate, to increase; but the love he bore her softened and beautified his nature, made him gentler towards his fellows, kinder, more tolerant, better. Sanctified by a great sorrow, subdued by the great defeat he had met with, strengthened with the conquest he had achieved over himself, by the victory he had gained, George Geith rose up after his sickness a better man, and went forth once again to his labor and his toil without a murmur.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

## THE LAST MOLOZANE.

THAT something had happened to him, the accountant, that he had passed through a great trial, through a fierce fire, any one might have guessed by looking in his face.

The moment he saw him, Mr. Molozane, ill as he was himself, guessed that it was not sickness alone which had kept his friend away.

"Mr. Bemmidge told me you were very unwell," he said, "but I fear you have been more than unwell, that you have had some heavy trouble."

"You are right," answered George, who had requested Mr. Bemmidge not to mention his loss to Mr. Molozane; "I have had a heavy trouble since I was here last; but it is over now; the worst is past."

That was all he said upon the subject then; but subsequently, when Mr. Molozane, knowing for certain that it was the hand of death he felt laid upon him, talked about the child he was leaving, and his misery thinking of her loneliness, George summoned up courage, and told him all. How he had loved the girl; how he had hoped to win her; how he had labored for her sake; how he had meant to ask her father's permission to wed her; and how, just at the last moment, the cup was dashed from his lips. All this the one man told the other, as they sat together in the sunlight of the early spring.

"There is only one comfort in it to me," said George, who read in his friend's face that he would have given Beryl into

his charge thankfully, "that it happened before I had spoken to her, before anything had been said which might have cast a shadow on her after-life. If ever she cared for me, she will forget me ere long — and I — Mr. Molozane, I thank God for giving me the burden to carry, and sparing her."

Out of the depths of his heart he could say that truthfully. He had loved so well, that his love was unselfish.

"You are the only man I ever met," Mr. Molozane answered, slowly, "that I should have liked for a son-in-law, with whom I should have felt happy to trust my child. Had I money to leave, I would give both it and her to you without a fear; but as neither of you has a fortune, it is perhaps, as you say, better to leave her choice unfettered, her fancy free; if," added Mr. Molozane, "it still be free. If, however, hereafter," he proceeded more slowly, "if in the course of God's providence, you and she ever should become man and wife, remember it is what I longed for before I died before any other earthly blessing. And if you never marry, be a friend to her when she wants a friend; and should she ever apply to you in any trouble or perplexity, will you stand to her, and help her as I should myself?"

Would he? Would George Geith not have worked for her, slaved for her, died for her? Would he not have taken her then, and run all risks of poverty, but for the dread that in so taking her he might be standing between her and a happier and more prosperous lot.

During Mr. Molozane's long sickness, all through those weeks of terrible suspense, and still more terrible certainty, the accountant longed, with a longing such as he had never before experienced, to tell his love to the girl, and ask leave to stand by her in the trial he saw approaching.

But as that might not be, as he thought they might never be more to one another than they were then, he held his peace, and Beryl passed through such suffering as would have made him speak in spite of himself, had he known it, all alone.



Now, for the first time in her life, Beryl felt the want of money, daily and hourly.

Mr. Molozane's was an expensive disease; expensive in the medical attendance it required, in the physical comforts it demanded, in the nourishment it necessitated.

All the oil that could be given was needed to keep the flickering flame alight from day to day. With less tender nursing, with less loving care, the man had been dead within a month; but as it was, Beryl's devotion kept him alive even beyond the time the great West-End doctor had pronounced it possible for him to survive.

With nothing coming in, with money eternally going out, Beryl's little store, which had been already broken in upon to defray the expenses attendant on Louise's illness, was soon exhausted. Still hopeful of her father's recovery, still reluctant to ask for help, or to beg assistance from any one, the girl gradually parted with every trinket, with every valuable she possessed. Even Louise's ear-rings, those two golden sovereigns, those six shabby-looking shillings which the dead girl had tossed over and over so lovingly on her death-bed, that money which Beryl had laid by like some hallowed treasure amongst the rest of her sister's little possessions, even that went before Beryl applied to Mrs. Richard Elsenham for assistance.

"Money, my dear," said that unselfish lady, when her visitor told her errand, and reluctantly entreated help. "Had you not better go to grandmamma? She has plenty, and I have not."

"I would rather not go to grandmamma," Beryl answered; "and remembering your great generosity to me before, Tilly, I should not have come to you now if I could have avoided it; but papa cannot live without things, which I have not the means of getting for him. You may think I have been extravagant, darling," she said, looking up from the footstool which she occupied, into her sister's face; "but I have not; indeed, indeed I have not. There was the furnishing, and

then the living, until papa got that situation. Then Looey's illness, and — the expenses of her funeral," Beryl added, after a pause. "And now, Tilly, papa has been three months ill, and I have had to pay doctors' fees, and to get wine and jellies, and beef-tea, and a hundred things; and I have not had a half-penny of help. Granny has never sent me a farthing."

"She must now, then," said Mrs. Richard Elsenham, "for I can't assist you."

"But you did once assist me, Tilly. I will never ask you again, and I am not asking you for myself now, but for papa." And Beryl laid her hand deprecatingly on her sister's arm, for she did not like the expression which came over that lady's face as she spoke.

"Get up, Beryl," said Mrs. Richard Elsenham, irritably, "and sit on a chair like other people."

After which pleasant speech the beauty began beating the carpet impatiently with her little foot.

"I can't help you," she went on, seeing Beryl waited for an answer. "I have not a sovereign in the world of my own."

"But, my dear Tilly," expostulated Beryl, "you have a very handsome settlement."

"In my position," answered her sister, "my handsome settlement, as you call it, hardly suffices to dress me suitably."

"And then, Granny is always making you presents," persisted Beryl.

"She does not make me presents now," returned young Mrs. Elsenham, shortly, "nor Richard either."

"Your husband has a very fine income," ventured Beryl.

"You had better go and ask him for some of it, then," was the reply. "He may, perhaps, give it to you; but it would be useless my asking him."

"I shall certainly not ask Dick Elsenham to bestow ~~aim~~ on the Molozanes, though he is married to one of them," said

Beryl, her face red with anger and disappointment; and she rose in a passion, and had reached the door, when some softer feeling came over her, and she paused and said, "Good-bye, Tilly. Though you have refused to help papa now, I will try not to forget you assisted us before, when we wanted assistance almost as badly. It was very generous of you, and one can't expect people to go on giving forever."

"Beryl, come back!" cried her sister, impulsively. "Beryl, I have something to tell you. Come back! It was not from me," she went on, "you got that money. I have owed as much; but I have never owned as much in my life. Mr. Wern left it with me for you. He is dead now, poor man, and it is better for you to know the truth."

"And you took the credit?"

"What could I do? He knew you would not have had it from him, and it was better for all of you for you to take it. If you had married, Miss Beryl, papa would never have needed to be a clerk in the city, and poor Louey might have been alive now. You made a terrible mistake then; you did, indeed."

"And it is fitting you should reproach me with it," retorted Beryl; "you, who have done so well for yourself, and who now will not hold out a finger to help your father on his death-bed, for it is his death-bed. You may believe it or not, just as you like; but it is the truth, and it is your duty to do what you can for him. Remembering all he has done for you, it ought to be your pleasure, too, I think."

She had shot home this time. At Beryl's words, at the sharp stinging sentence which her misery had wrung from her, Matilda's thoughts flew back to a time when she was not altogether selfish, to the old familiar scenes, to the half-forgotten woods, to the better, happier life, she had had in the days that were now past and gone forever.

"He is not dying," she said, and the hot tears came into her eyes, and Mrs. Richard Elsenham once forgot herself, as she spoke: "If it were true, you could not talk about it so quietly, Beryl."

"If you had passed through as much trouble as I have the last six months," answered the girl, "perhaps you could be quiet too;" and she sat down on the nearest couch, and resting her tired head on her hand, waited till her sister's sorrow should have expended itself.

"I have no money," said Mrs. Richard Elsenham, at last receiving her handkerchief, and turning her face swollen with weeping towards Beryl, "but I have jewels. Take them, and get all he requires, and I will come and see him oftener. I will come and stay with you, if you will let me; I did not know he was so ill. Oh! Beryl, why did you not tell me before?"

"I was hoping against hope, Tilly," was the reply, "and I should not have told you now only that you seemed so cold and hard, I could not help it. Come as often as you can; come and stay if you like, but I will not take your trinkets, thank you. You might want them for the first ball you were invited to, and wish you had them back again."

It was not a generous speech, but to save her life Beryl could not have kept silence. Next minute she was sorry for it, and went over and begged her sister's pardon, persisting, nevertheless, in her determination not to take the jewels, but rather go to her grandmother, and get help from her.

"I think Granny will not refuse me," said Beryl, meditatively, "she owes me some gratitude for that ride to Watisbridge, though it was useless, and I have never asked her for anything before; besides, bad as she is, I can't fancy she would like her daughter's husband to want for absolute necessities in his last illness."

"Tell her she shall have Guess," remarked Mrs. Richard Elsenham, "that will make her pleasant at once."

If her grandmother had asked for her right hand, Beryl would have given it; and when weighed in the scales with her father's comfort, Guess seemed a small sacrifice for the girl to make.

Nevertheless Beryl did feel it a sacrifice, and debated

within herself, as she crossed Kensington Gardens, whether begging in the streets would not, after all, be a more independent proceeding than asking help from her relations — whether it would not be placing him less under an obligation to write to some of her father's old friends, than thus to go from sister to grandmother, praying for that which was nothing more than her right.

Had Mr. Wern been living, she would have gone to him, and on that lovely May-day Beryl sighed bitter sighs of repentance because she had refused to marry the man who could have helped them all.

“I thought of myself before either papa or Louey,” was the idea uppermost in the poor child's mind. “If I had to do it again, I would marry him a hundred times over.”

But Beryl had not to do it again — had no other chance of help than the hope that her grandmother would be generous, that she would give her enough to buy “all papa wanted.”

To be sure there was the furniture, which she had not thought of before; she might sell the greatest portion of it. Could she not ask Mr. Geith to find some one who would buy it? But no; somehow Beryl could not ask Mr. Geith about anything. It would have seemed to her easier to stop the first passer-by and request him to advance what she required, than to take the over-familiar friend into her confidence again.

For something had come to him which she could not understand, and something had also come to her which she did not understand either, and did not want to think about; besides, she did not want to hasten by an hour that terrible breaking up she saw dimly looming in the future.

There was no choice, therefore, but applying to her grandmother, who received Beryl; who gave her twenty pounds without a murmur; who called her a good girl, and was generously pleased to accept Guess.

“I am afraid I shall never be able to repay this, grand-

mamma," said Beryl, taking the notes, hesitatingly, really thinking that Mrs. Elsenham had given them to her under some delusion.

"I have made Richard and his wife presents worth five times that, oftener than I could tell you, and they have scarcely had the grace to say thank you," replied her grandmother; "keep it, Beryl; you are a good girl, though you may have been a foolish one." And Mrs. Elsenham patted her on the back, and drove her home to Stock Orchard Crescent, whence the old lady did not forget to take *Geeth* to his new quarters.

Twenty pounds! It was not a large amount, and yet it proved more than enough to supply all Mr. Molozane's earthly needs.

Before half of it was gone, Ambrose Alfred Molozane, Esq., formerly of Molozane Park, Herts, had departed to the land where, happily, bank-notes are useless, and Beryl was left in a world where they are indispensable, penniless, and alone.

"Have you any place to go? What do you intend doing? Will you come and stay with us?" were the questions Matilda put to Beryl, who, prostrated and tearless, lay on a sofa, thinking stupidly of her bereavement and her isolation.

"I do not know what I shall do," answered Beryl, "but I shall not go to stay at your house, thank you, Tilly;" and then, in her utter loneliness and helplessness, she buried her face in the sofa-pillow, thinking over, and over, and over again. "If I cannot die, what shall I do? where can I go?"

"Where could she go?" George Geith put that very same question to himself as he sat in Fen Court on the evening of Mr. Molozane's funeral.

Poor as he was, he felt half inclined even then to go and tell her all his love; all his sorrow; all his longing to protect her; and it is probable he might, in the house where the dead had so lately been carried, have asked her to be his

wife, but that Beryl, without the slightest symptom of dissatisfaction at the arrangement, stated she was going to reside with her grandmother.

"I thought, perhaps," observed George, "you might have liked to live with your sister."

"I could not live in the same house with her husband," answered Beryl; and the pair shook hands in farewell.

"Miss Molozane," said George, and his voice shook for a moment, and he held Beryl's thin fingers so tightly in his grasp, that the pressure hurt her. "You have wealthy relations, and will make friends wherever you go; still, the time may come when even a poor man like what I am could serve you. If it should, do not forget me. To the last hour of my life I shall never forget you."

She tried to speak, she tried to thank him, but there was something stronger than her own will tearing at her heart and suffocating her.

She knew as well he had loved her, that he did love her, as though he had told her so, over, and over, and over. And she knew, moreover, that she loved him, and yet that for some sufficient reason he would never ask her to marry him; that being all the world to one another, they yet were not to be man and wife.

A poor reason it would have seemed to be had she guessed it; but still, knowing her rich grandmother was about to take her, it was sufficient and more than sufficient to keep George Geith from speaking out his thoughts.

She would marry well in the happy days that he hoped were yet in store for her. He would not stand between her and the light. Thus thinking, the accountant left Stock Orchard Crescent, and walked sorrowfully back to the city to resume that life of incessant hard work and utter loneliness which was his portion before he ever beheld the man whose mortal remains he had seen that day, borne along the Hertfordshire lanes, through the woods, and beside the meadows, to be laid at last in the narrow house appointed for all living.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

## SUNSHINE.

It was summer once again, and George Geith sat in his office, thinking, not writing. He had changed the position of his desk, which now stood with its end instead of its back between the windows, and consequently as the accountant bent listlessly over his papers, the sunbeams streamed upon his head, and the breeze which found ingress through the open casement, and blew the disclosed blind aside, stirred his hair gently.

Fifteen months had passed since Norton's failure — fifteen months of such toil, such anxiety, and such loneliness as had plentifully besprinkled his hair with gray, and drawn lines across his forehead.

How he had worked in the time, how he had battled, and battled successfully, against both his ill fortune and his sorrow, was a story he could not have told to any one, but somehow he had worked and he had battled, and if he were poor he was at any rate clear of debt.

Norton's estate had not paid a very high dividend, only five farthings in the pound, but George Geith felt very thankful even for that when it came; when in lieu of his ten thousand five hundred and fifty pounds, he pocketed the precise sum of sixty-three pounds one shilling and five pence halfpenny.

Whether he derived an equal amount of satisfaction from the knowledge that Mr. Norton and Mrs. Norton, and all the little Nortons, to say nothing of a fry of other people, who



were related to the Nortons either by blood or matrimony, and contrived, by aid of marriage settlements and various such like expedients, to escape the common ruin, may be readily doubted.

Mr. Norton retired to his "wife's property" in Devonshire, where he had ample time for indulgence in his favorite hobby, yachting.

Years afterwards, when the accountant occupied a different position, both in the city and at the West End, the ex-banker, meeting him at Ilfracombe, was kind enough to forget about the past, and ask him to dine with him, an invitation which tried George Geith's courtesy and his temper to the utmost; at those days in which he was thought good enough to be requested to sit at the table of the man who had robbed him, were yet far distant when he sat, as I have said, thinking, in Fen Court.

Thinking not pleasantly over a proposition which his clerk, Mr. Foss, had made to him the day previously, and which he, Mr. Geith, had declined that same morning. Mr. Foss wanted to be taken into partnership, wanted to place himself, and a thousand pounds left to him a month before by his father, on an equality with his present employer.

Of course, the thing was not to be thought of. To take a partner at all would, to a man like George Geith, under the most favorable circumstances, have been a most disagreeable proceeding; but to promote his own clerk, to be indebted to his paltry thousand pounds for money to carry on the business! Gall and wormwood would have been sweet to George Geith in comparison to that.

There is no aristocrat like a democrat. Having felt democratical towards those above him, it was only natural that the accountant should likewise feel it only right to keep those below himself in their proper station.

Further than this, there were other reasons which caused Mr. Foss's proposition to be peculiarly distasteful to Mr. Geith.

In the first place, the young man had been with him a long time, knew his ways, was tolerably well acquainted with the business, and could be thoroughly depended on for his time.

Secondly, he was too well acquainted with Mr. Geith's customers to render the idea of his starting in business for himself palatable.

Thirdly, the accountant knew that by refusing to take him into partnership he had made enemies for life of all the female Bemmidges and Gillings.

He had behaved wickedly enough in their eyes by his insensibility towards the charms of the fair Gertrude, but to refuse to advance the interests of that lady's future husband was more wicked still.

Mrs. Gilling herself had come to his office not an hour before to urge him to reconsider his decision.

George shrewdly suspected she had been lying in wait somewhere in the neighborhood till that decision should be communicated to Mr. Foss.

Solemnly, sitting opposite to him in his wooden chair, crying and perspiring freely, Mrs. Gilling had assured him that "'Eney loved him like a brother, and respected him as a father. Take him into partnership, Mr. Geith, do."

"Mrs. Gilling," replied Mr. Geith, "I do not want a partner."

"But it will be better for you to have one," said the lady; "better for your 'ealth and 'appiness and your business."

"Of that you must allow me to judge," was the answer.

"Why, Mr. Geith, everybody that knows you knows Norton's failure shook you considerable. You have never looked the same since, and I am sure if you had been my own son, I could not have felt more cut up than I did, to see you lying like a dead man in Sophia's spare bedroom."

What could the accountant do after this, but express his eternal obligations to Mrs. Gilling for her motherly sympathy and unremitting attention.

He was extremely grateful for the kindness that had been shown him by Mr. Bemmidge and all his family. He assured Mrs. Gilling he did not, and could not, forget.

"Well, then, if that is the way of it, why can't we all be comfortable and friendly together? What, with 'Enery's money and your connection, if you worked together you might get on, if it pleased the Lord, first-rate, whereas, if you do not, you will be like an 'ouse'old divided against itself, as the saying is," added Mrs. Gilling, perfectly unconscious that she was quoting Scripture, and Scripture incorrectly.

"To speak plainly, you mean, I suppose, that, if I do not take him into partnership, Mr. Foss will, on the knowledge he has gained in my employment, start on his own account, and take such of my customers with him as he can manage to secure."

"'Enery would do nothing dishonorable, I can assure you, Mr. Geith," said Mrs. Gilling with dignity.

"Of course not; but he cannot prevent people following him if such be their fancy."

"Well, you know," said Mrs. Gilling, who was certainly no match in cleverness for the accountant, "some might like 'Enery better nor you."

"It would be only reasonable to suppose so," observed George Geith.

"And whatever friends Andrew Bemmidge has sent to you, would naturally follow 'Enery, if he commenced for himself."

"That, also, is a reasonable supposition," agreed the accountant.

"So that putting two and two together, 'Arry's leaving you can't do you any good, and may do you harm," finished Mrs. Gilling; "and if you would take the advice of an old woman who has both your interests at heart, you would not part now, nor divide a business that a'n't over and above large as it is."

"You must have been sorry to hear from Mr. Foss how much my business has lately decreased," remarked Mr. Geith.

"Bless you, 'Enery says as how that 's nothing. With a little money and another clerk, he thinks it could all be brought back in no time. Mr. Geith, you will be advised; you won't let a useful young man like that, who has your interest at heart, slip through your fingers."

"You are really very kind and considerate," answered George. "I will think over what you have said."

"And don't decide in a hurry, Mr. Geith, unless you decide to say 'yes,'" were Mrs. Gilling's last words as the accountant opened the door for her, and watched her progress down-stairs.

When she had disappeared, Mr. Geith called in his clerk, and repeated what he had said to him in the morning, with the addendum, that he should like Mr. Foss to leave his employment at once.

"It is not," he added, "because you are going to start in business for yourself; it is not because you may take a few of my clients with you that I say this; but it does not suit my purpose, Mr. Foss, to have a person here who canvasses my business difficulties amongst his friends."

"I am very sorry," said the young man, turning first pale and then red, "I did not mean to do any harm. I did not think talking the matter over at Holloway could injure you in any way."

"Then, before you commence on your own account, you had better learn that, in business, great is the gift of silence. When you have been an accountant for a twelvemonth, you will not like any move of your game to be discussed by a parcel of chattering women."

"You will let me stay till you have got somebody else in my place," pleaded Mr. Foss. "I should not like to leave you in a corner." But Mr. Geith was firm.

"I do not intend to have another clerk at all at present,"

he answered ; " it will not only prevent your talking about my affairs for the future, but also, perhaps, induce you hereafter to hold your tongue about your own. There is your month's salary in lieu of notice. And now good-bye ; I wish you every success in your new undertaking."

Decidedly Mr. Geith had the best of it. Mr. Foss felt this ; and after having refused to take his salary, an idea which George pooh-poohed as absurd, he left the office with a check in his pocket, and the kind wishes of his late employer ringing in his ears.

Spite of his thousand pounds and Andrew Bemmidge's connection, Henry Foss began to be very doubtful indeed of the wisdom of the step he had taken, and wished from the bottom of his heart that his mother-in-law elect had kept her fingers out of his pie.

" Indeed, it will be a lesson to me," he thought, as he walked a purposeless, wretched walk down Fenchurch Street to Aldgate, and thence through the blazing sun up Commercial Street, and round by Norton Folgate into Shoreditch. " I won't open my lips about business matters again : I won't even tell one of them I have been discharged, and I will go back and ask Mr. Geith not to tell Bemmidge either."

" Very well," said Mr. Geith, when Mr. Foss preferred the petition ; " but I think you had better make a confidant of him. He is here two or three times a week, and would scarcely believe you were ' out ' always."

" I do not know what to do," remarked Mr. Foss, despairingly.

" I will tell you what to do," answered the accountant ; " go and look out an office at once ; have your name painted on the door-post as soon as may be, and get to work without delay. We part without any unpleasant feelings on either side, I trust, and if I can do you a good turn, or send you a customer, I will."

" I should like to stay with you, if you would let me," ventured Mr. Foss.

“Thank you ; but I find my business will not afford a clerk, and I decidedly decline a partner.”

After this, Mr. Foss went out again, and George Geith was left alone.

Sitting there, I think he felt like a man who from the summit of some lonely rock watches vessel after vessel disappearing from sight, till the last sail dips below the horizon. Everything had left him now, save his health, his business, and his energy. Would they depart likewise ? if they did, what was to become of him ?

Thinking of this ; thinking of the time when the tale of his life had been so rich in promise, in hope, and in happiness, the man felt his courage failing him, and was about to recommence his work, and so banish painful recollections, when a light tap came to the door — a light, timid tap — the tap of a person who had paused and hesitated before knocking at all.

“Come in,” said George ; but no one availed himself of the permission.

Fancying he must have been mistaken, the accountant resumed his writing, when all at once something like a heavy hand was laid on the panel, something which made the hinges give, and the lock rattle.

“What the devil can it be ? Why can’t the idiot come in ?” he muttered, rising, nevertheless, and trying the handle.

As he did so, Royal gravely walked past him into the office ; and, standing on the threshold, George beheld Beryl Molozane.

How — seeing her so unexpectedly — he even refrained from taking her in his arms and holding her to his heart ; how he retained sufficient presence of mind to greet her quietly, and place a chair for her, and talk to her like a rational being, George Geith never knew ; but somehow he did manage to keep his senses, and ask her how she was, and whence she had come.

“I am quite well again now, thank you,” Beryl answered ;

"and I have come from Bayswater, all that long way, Mr. Geith, to beg you to do me a favor. Do you remember what you said to me the last time I saw you to speak to? You told me if ever you could serve me you would, and so I have come to you to ask you to serve me now."

He could not answer her in many words, he dared not trust himself to say much, so he only told her that if she would show him how, he would do whatever she required.

"I should not have come had I not been sure of it," she answered, laying her hand on Royal's head as she spoke. "You must think it strange seeing me here at all," she went on after a moment's pause, "but I know if I wrote, grandmamma would most likely intercept your reply."

"I called once to see you," said George, more perhaps by way of saying something than for any other reason, "but you were not at home."

"No; and Granny sent you a letter telling you to keep away; Matilda told me so. I might have thought you had quite forgotten there ever were such people as papa, and Louey, and I, but for hearing that."

"I was not likely to forget the happiest part of my life," he said, earnestly.

"I saw you once in Oxford Street," she ran on, still caressing Royal as she spoke, "and I tried so hard to get you to look at me, but you would not. I was in the carriage with grandmamma, or I would have gone after you. I do not think any prisoner had ever less freedom than I have had since I saw you. I have borne it till I can bear it no longer, and now I am going to try and do something for myself, if you will help me."

"How can I help you?" he inquired.

"In the first place I want you to find a kind master for Royal, and in the next I wish you would put an advertisement in the *Times* for me. If I could get a situation of any kind — as companion, as housekeeper, as nursery governess, I should be so thankful, so delighted. I am not clever enough to be

a governess, but I can sew, and I could teach little children and take care of their clothes. I would do anything, Mr. Geith, to get away from Bayswater; you cannot think how wretched I have been."

And she stooped over the dog, who turned his wise eyes first upon her, and then questioningly on George Geith.

"She won't let me keep Royal," said Beryl, her sobs breaking out at last; "she ordered him to be shot, because he would not, and could not, be made to shake hands with everybody she wanted; and he would have been dead by this time, only that I stole out while she thought I was dressing to go with her to the Exhibition, and untied him, and got a cab and brought him here to you. I could not have lived if they had killed him," she proceeded passionately, "for I like him better than any relative I have now on earth. Don't I, Royal,—don't you know I do?"

Whereupon the dog, as if he had understood what she said, rose up majestically, and laid his great head in her lap.

What a lonely little soul it was, with nothing but a black retriever to love! What a desolate little girl she looked to George Geith, sitting there with both arms round Royal's neck, hugging him.

"It breaks my heart to part with him," she said, looking at her auditor, and striking first one of the dog's great paws and then the other as she spoke. "I cannot bear to think of his getting as fond of other people as he is now of me. And yet still I could not wish him not to get fond. Royal, will you ever like anybody so well as you have liked me; won't you be always wishing for the old days to come back again?"

In answer to which speech Royal lifted his disengaged paw and laid it triumphantly on Beryl's shoulder.

"You must think me very foolish, Mr. Geith," she said, pushing the dog gently away, and resuming the quiet self-possession she had brought into the office with her—quiet-



ness and a self-possession unknown to the Beryl he remembered so well ; "but, indeed, parting with Royal seems to me like parting with the last home thing belonging to me. What can I do, though," she added, sorrowfully. "You will find a good home for him. I think he would like it in the country, and where there are children, best. If I knew he was not fretting, if I heard about him sometimes, I think I could be happy."

"I should have imagined your sister would have taken him," said George. "Remember, I shall be only too glad to find him a kind master ; and am only suggesting Mrs. Richard Elsenham, because I thought you would, perhaps, like such an arrangement best."

"My sister, Mr. Geith," answered Beryl, "would take nothing grandmamma discarded, unless to please grandmamma ; she would not give me a night's shelter — supposing I needed shelter — if she thought grandmamma would hear about it."

"So that there is now no person in the world who cares what you do or where you go to?" observed George, almost involuntarily.

"I cannot say that exactly," was Beryl's reply. "Matilda would greatly like me away from Bayswater, because she thinks — because, in fact" — hesitated the girl — "both Richard and she imagine I might hereafter stand in their way, while grandmamma would like me to remain at Bayswater as her slave, her state prisoner — what you will."

"And you have quite decided on trying to earn your bread," continued George. "It is hard work, Miss Molo-zane, I can tell you, I who have tried the experiment."

"I am not afraid," she answered. "If I earned my own bread, I should at any rate have a right to what I ate of it ; if I worked hard, I might perhaps get an hour of peace and quietness now and then. Beyond all things, I should be free. I should be allowed to labor without having to weigh my words, and looks, and thoughts, for fear of committing myself."

“And what do you intend to do about references?” he asked.

“I shall refer to Miss Finch.”

“And where do you wish the replies to be forwarded?”

“To you, if you please. And I want you to tell the people who answer, all about me, and to decide for me, and to let me know only when all is finally decided. Matilda will take charge of one letter for me — only one, for she says she must not be mixed up in the matter in any way.”

“And would it be impossible for me to see you about any of the replies?”

“I am afraid so; grandmamma would not like it — like your calling, I mean. Indeed, I know she would greatly object to my seeing any old friend. And it would be of no use writing,” she went on, “for I should never get the letters.”

“You appear to be comfortably situated,” he remarked.

“I am comfortably situated,” she said, “and yet every hour in the day Granny tells me I ought to be grateful to her, and do what she wants to show I am grateful.”

“And what does she want, if I am not impertinent?” asked George, a little eagerly.

“What I am not going to do,” returned Beryl, rising hurriedly. “Will you take charge of Royal for me, Mr. Geith; and will you insert the advertisement in the Times?”

“I will certainly take charge of Royal,” he answered, with a forced, anxious smile, “and I will also insert the advertisement, but I should like to talk to you a little more about your intention. I will not ask you to stay here any longer; for though this is not my busy time, still people are always coming in for one thing or another. May I walk back with you a little way? should you have any objection to my accompanying you?”

“The cab is waiting for me,” she hesitated.

“We can dismiss it,” he said; but still she stood irresolute. She asked him what time it was; she wondered how

long it would take to drive to Bayswater; she considered whether she could not have time to see him at her sister's; she swayed backward and forward like a pendulum, now saying she could, now thinking she could not, till finally she plucked up courage sufficient to do what he wished, observing at the same time that she knew the worst which could befall. "Granny cannot do more than kill me, or tell me to leave the house."

"It would be rather a relief to you to be ordered to do the latter, perhaps," suggested George; but Beryl shook her head. She was in possession of a secret which was sealed to him, that she had but half a sovereign of her own in the world, and nobody knew better than Beryl how short a time half a sovereign would last if she had to board and lodge herself out of it.

"You had better give Royal something to take care of," said Beryl; "he will not stay behind unless he thinks he is well employed here."

And so they deluded the dog: Beryl, by taking a little scarf off her neck and handing it to George Geith; and George Geith, by laying it down before the animal and bidding him keep it safe.

I am inclined to think Royal knew they were cheating him, that the whole trio understood the proceeding perfectly; for the dog lifted his head and looked at Beryl so reproachfully when she was leaving the back office where they had put him for better keeping, that she had to turn back at the very door, and coax, and pat, and fondle, and, as George verily believed, kiss him, ere she went.

"I know you will not let him go to any place where they are not sure to treat him kindly," she said, as she and George went down the stairs together.

"If you allow me, I will keep him myself," answered George.

"Will you? Will you really be troubled with him?" she exclaimed, eagerly. "Then I shall be happy, quite

happy ;” and with something of her old elasticity, Beryl skipped along the passage. “You will find him of use too,” she added ; “he would keep office for you like a Christian, or better, perhaps, than some Christians. I’d like to see the man would dare to lift one of your papers while Royal was alive. Mr. Geith, I have not thanked you yet. I believe the last thing I ever thought of in old times was thanking you, no matter what you did for me.”

Every moment she grew more and more like the Beryl, the well-remembered Beryl, of the past.

All the reserve, all the quietness she had acquired at Bayswater dropped off her as she walked along Fenchurch Street, and up Lime Street, and along Leadenhall Street, and down Cornhill, with the truest friend she had ever met with in her life.

“I could dance,” she said, “if it would not scandalize the citizens. I could jump for joy to be out by myself for half an hour. Oh ! Mr. Geith, if you but knew ; if you could but conceive what being with grandmamma is like. I think living in one of the condemned cells in Newgate must be pleasant and cheerful in comparison to that.”

## CHAPTER XL.

## MARRIED.

FROM Cornhill George Geith took Beryl Molozane past the back of the Royal Exchange, across Threadneedle Street, down Bartholomew Lane, into Austin Friars.

Is there a quieter place in the City than Austin Friars, a more world-forsaken, more forgotten nook? If there be, I do not know it; if there were in the days when he guided Beryl Molozane thither, the accountant did not know it either.

Along the lonely streets they paced; past the Dutch Church, round the courtyard where stands the great house with the large portico, round, and round, and round, talking to her. The accountant never wondered how his clients were faring in the interim; listening to him, Beryl forgot about Bayswater and her grandmother altogether.

Into every nook and corner of Austin Friars they penetrated; up and down every street, and lane, and passage they wandered; and in that little desert in the middle of a great city, George Geith poured the old, old story of his love and his disappointment into sympathetic ears.

How he had longed to make her his wife, how he had worked for her sake, how he had been flung back from the very summit of success, how he had feared to ask her to link her lot with poverty; all these things he told her as they walked through Austin Friars, in the mist, and calm, and sunshine of that lovely August afternoon.

He told her precisely what suited himself; everything

which looked well in the picture he grouped together for her inspection; and for the rest, the girl had no near relation living to ask about the darker shadows, about the memories hanging beside the river's brink, at the point where the stream of his life diverged from the Church into trade.

She put no questions, he had to invent no falsehoods, she had perfect faith in him; why should she ask anything concerning his antecedents? In her own heart there was no solitary event she desired to conceal, and it was therefore all the easier for her to believe all he said implicitly.

With the sunshine streaming upon her, with no cloud in the sky above, with the only man she had ever cared sufficiently for to make parting from him a regret, was it not natural that she should hearken to him kindly, that she should believe him implicitly.

And all he told her, she had the best of good reasons for believing, because it was true, true as they both lived, as they both had suffered, that George Geith loved her devotedly, — would love her till he died.

If in the past there did lie a skeleton, was he altogether to blame for letting the dry bones rest, for making no mention of the sorrow that had robbed him of his youth?

When, in the future, Beryl stood face to face with that sorrow, when she had to bear her part of the common trouble, she never reproached him even in thought for his concealment; and at the time of which I am now writing, it was happiness enough for her to know "she loved, she was beloved," without insisting on visiting every secret chamber in the heart of the man who was for the future to be hers, all in all.

That was the end of it; never a wooing was shorter, never a love-tale proved easier in the telling. True the girl was not so quick about her answer as might have been desired, but then the circumstances were against a speedy answer, and it was but natural, that, surprised and flurried and rejoiced, she should require time to collect her thoughts, and gather her scattered senses together.

“And I should like, Mr. Geith,” she said, as they walked along London Wall, and down Monkwell Street, and across Falcon Square, and so to the cab-stand in St. Martin’s-le-Grand; “I should like not only to talk what you have said over with Matilda, but also to be quite certain you mean it, that you have not spoken in a hurry, and that you will not repent when you get back to Fen Court.”

“And how shall I ever be able to assure you of that,” he answered, “unless I can see you often enough to repeat the same thing till you grow weary of hearing it.”

“It seems so much as if — as if” — she hesitated.

“As if you had come to bring happiness to a wretched, lonely being,” he finished. “Ah! Beryl, believe me, I should never have told you what I have told you at such a time and in such a place, had I seen any hope of speaking to you in your grandmother’s house. Shall I come and ask her for you formally?” he added. “Shall I say, ‘Madam, I have not a penny independent of my business, and still I aspire to marry your grandchild.’ What would she do? — order the footman to turn me out, I suppose.”

“I think it is very likely she might,” sighed Beryl; “but yet I wish — oh! I do wish so much” —

“That you could have foreseen everything that has happened to-day, and never came to the city at all,” he asked.

“No; but I wish you had said what you have said to me to-day when papa was living. I wish he had told me. I did not think he would have kept anything back. I knew I had no secrets from him.”

“He doubtless thought it best,” answered George, sorrowfully; “and God knows I thought it best too. But Beryl,” he added, smiling in spite of himself at her little coquetry, at her transparent affectation of keeping him in suspense, at her poor pretence of not knowing whether to answer Yes or No, at the barrier she made believe to erect for the sole purpose of knocking it down again; “but Beryl,

if you would have had me then, why cannot you terminate my misery, and assure me you will have me now?"

"You are not miserable," she pouted, "you know quite well; that is, I mean — that is, you are sure" —

"Of what your answer will be," he suggested. "May I say it for you: I am to be happy — you will share my poverty, you will be my wife."

"I shall not tell you," she said; "you want to know too much. I shall not say anything more now." And the Beryl of old, the Beryl he had first loved amongst the green fields of Hertfordshire, came back in tone, in manner, in look as she spoke, came back and stood beside him so really for a moment, that, but for her deep mourning-dress, and her thin, pale face, George might have thought the last few years a dream, and the streets through which they were walking alone together an illusion of his senses.

"There is one thing, at all events, which you will not write to me," he said, standing by the door of the cab he had procured for her, "promise me that, Beryl; you will not surely — you will not write me 'No.'"

She did not reply in words; apparently she had made up her mind that she would not be compelled to answer him against her will; but he felt the hand he held clasp his tightly, and he saw that, though she was trying to smile as if in mockery of him, her eyes were full of tears.

"I will rest satisfied, then; I will try to be patient," he answered; and while the cab jolted over the stones to Bayswater, he walked back to Fen Court, feeling that since morning a volume had been opened to him he then thought sealed forever.

When he entered his office, his first care was for Royal, who had sat since his departure watching the scarf with a gravity fitting the dignity of deportment he affected.

"That is my good dog," said George, taking the scarf from between the animal's paws; and it is not too much to add that the accountant could have blessed Royal for bringing Beryl to Fen Court.



"Come here, old fellow," was the invitation further extended, as George saw him wandering about the two rooms, evidently searching for something which neither apartment contained. "Come here, old fellow; are we not to be good friends, Royal? Shall we be stanch friends, for the sake of the old days departed, for the hope of the good days to come?"

Gravely and solemnly the retriever surveyed his new master; quietly he listened, as though every word conveyed some meaning to his ear; and at last, when George had quite finished, Royal sat down on his haunches and lifted one paw in token of amity and acceptance towards his new master.

During the days that came and went after that, Mr. Geith found great comfort in his companion.

He felt sure Beryl would not forget the man who had her favorite in charge. Royal was a link between them; Royal would compel her to write, if consideration for him did not. So the accountant, self-tormenting, like all men in love, consoled himself, as though a hundred Royals could have been of so much importance as one George Geith, as Beryl deluded herself with no such idea, at any rate. It was not long before a note from her arrived at Fen Court, a note stating she had got a terrible scolding on her return home, but that her sin in finding a home for Royal seemed now forgotten.

"It might not so soon," she added, "if grandmamma knew where I had lodged him."

"The very same day," went on the writer, "she (grandmamma) caught a cold at the Exhibition, and now she is laid up with it completely, and unable to leave her room. If, therefore, you could call now, I think you might have a chance of seeing me, more particularly if you called early, say at twelve o'clock."

Not another sentence; no "no," nothing, except that she remained his sincerely, Beryl Molozane; which was all very

well in its way, but George had expected a more definitive reply, and was disappointed accordingly.

As a matter of course, however, the accountant proceeded to Bayswater, where he had the pleasure of seeing Beryl solus, Mrs. Elsenham being still confined to bed.

"I have not spoken to Matilda," said Beryl to George Geith, as they sat in Mrs. Elsenham's drawing-room, the splendor whereof somehow made the lover think he had done a very wicked thing in asking Beryl to link her lot with his. "I have not spoken to Matilda, because I was afraid of doing anything to compromise her with grandmamma. Whatever I do, Mr. Geith, I find I must do so on my own responsibility. It would not be right to run any chance of injuring her, would it?"

George thought decidedly it would not; and by degrees all Beryl's troubles were explained, how Mr. and Mrs. Richard Elsenham were jealous of her growing influence over Mrs. Elsenham senior. "Sometimes they say I am a toady, and sometimes they call her a stingy, unprincipled old wretch," Beryl explained; "and whatever they say, it always amounts to this, that we are both doing them an injury. Grandmamma does not like Matilda now as she used," went on the girl; "and I greatly question whether she will ever leave Dick a penny. So long as they were quite dependent on her, they used to be grateful and respectful, but now they are neither; and grandmamma does not like it, and says if I marry to her mind she will make me her sole heiress."

"And shall you marry to her mind?" asked George, breathlessly.

"No, Mr. Geith, I have quite made up my mind to that; so I shall never have a penny."

"Mrs. Elsenham wished you to marry some protégé of her own, I presume," he suggested.

"Yes; but I will not marry to please her; she has no right to ask me to do such a thing, and I should have no right to gratify her."

“You have quite made up your mind to that?” he repeated. “Have you made up your mind, dear Beryl, to give up all those advantages, all certainty of position, all hope of wealth, and cast your lot with mine.”

She did not say whether she had or not, but she put out both hands with a pretty gesture of assent, stretched them to him eagerly, as though she were giving herself at the same time.

Evidently she expected him to take the gift she offered, but George was not going to be contented with such ambiguous replies for the future, and taking Beryl to his heart, asked if she was certain she would confer on him a right to keep her there forever.

“And if ever I give you cause to repent your choice, to repent the trust you have reposed in me, may God make me regret that the sun ever shone for me on this the happiest day of my life.”

Prophetic words, though they were spoken without the slightest idea that in the mournful hereafter they would be remembered with a bitterness like unto the bitterness of death. Prophetic; though they sounded to Beryl but as an assurance of the truth and loyalty of the man she had chosen.

Now that there was a rival in the case, George felt that the sooner all preliminaries were arranged the better for them both.

In his hands Beryl was content to leave everything. Dimly she felt that, deceiving her grandmother as she was, the sooner she ceased living under her roof and eating her bread the better; and accordingly she agreed, without hesitation, to George's proposal, for their marriage to take place as soon as might be.

“I shall tell no one until it is all over,” said the young lady; “I never could face grandmamma's anger unless I was ready to fly from her on the spot. Write to me what you wish me to do, and send your letter to Matilda; but do

not write more than the once. It may seem to you ridiculous, but I am afraid of grandma now. She might lock me up in a madhouse; she might kill me; I am sure I do not know what Granny might not do, if she had the slightest idea I was going to run away with you."

"It will not be long before I free you from her control," George answered, laughing; and he proved as good as his word, for he settled the necessary preliminaries so rapidly that, before another month was over, Beryl and he left St. Matthew's, Bayswater, man and wife.

She had slipped out of the house long ere her grandmother's usual hour of rising, and walked in the most matter-of-fact way conceivable with George Geith, who was waiting close at hand for her, to church.

She had no bridesmaid, he no groomsmen; the clerk gave her away; the pew-opener had a supply of water in the vestry ready for emergencies, but Beryl had not the slightest idea of fainting. If she trembled, it was not at the thought of intrusting George with the care of her future life, but because she dreaded the interview with her grandmother, which she knew was close at hand.

In ten minutes Beryl Molozane was transformed into Beryl Geith. The marriage was as good as though the ceremony had been performed in the presence of fifty witnesses; and there can be no reason to doubt but that the clerk and pew-opener found the money put into their hands by the happy bridegroom quite as acceptable as though the pair had come separately in carriages, accompanied by a squad of relations and a bevy of bridesmaids.

"Are you sorry, Beryl?" he asked, as they passed out of the church.

"No; but I dread facing Granny after what I have done."

"Why need you face her? can you not write?"

"I will bid her good-bye, properly," said Beryl, though it is very likely she will tell me to make haste and leave the house while I am in the middle of my sentence. She has

tried to be kind to me, and I must see her for the last time. Besides," added Mrs. George Geith, "if we are going, as you say, to the Isle of Wight, I shall require some clothes to wear there, and I should like to take my luggage away from grandmamma's now."

"With all my heart," said George; but if I add that this courage was assumed, and that he really quaked at the thought of an encounter with Mrs. Elsenham, the reader will, I trust, have sympathy for him.

He would rather have undertaken a pilgrimage than a visit to Mrs. Elsenham. He would sooner have encountered a lion than his wife's grandmother, who stood at the top of the first flight of stairs as the newly-married pair entered the hall.

Further than the hall the lady would not permit him to penetrate; and she would have denied him the pleasure of kicking his heels on the oil-cloth, but that he flatly refused to leave the house till he took his wife out of it with him.

"If you think she shall ever have a halfpenny from me, you are greatly mistaken," shrieked Mrs. Elsenham; "I would rather give it to a beggar in the street; I would sooner endow some charity or found an hospital than let her have a sixpence, the ungrateful, deceitful minx."

"Do not talk to him like that, grandmamma," said Beryl, imploringly; "we do not want your money, we will never trouble you for any help; only let me get my things, and we will leave the house at once."

"If you had had the spirit of a man," screamed the lady, perfectly unmindful of Beryl's intercession, "you would have come and asked me for her, and not stolen her like a thief in the night. How am I to know she is married to you. I always told her father he was mad to have you so much at the house. I wrote to you myself that you should not call here. I have been a parent to her, and would have done more for her than her parents ever did; I was growing fond of her. I had set my heart on her making a good match,

and you have robbed me of her; you have not taken her fairly like an honorable man, but meanly and clandestinely like a low adventurer as you are."

"Grandmamma, for pity's sake," expostulated Beryl, in a whisper, "remember the servants."

"I do not care about the servants," retorted Mrs. Elsenham, who was fairly beside herself with rage. "They know whom I wished you to marry, and they shall know, likewise, who it is you have chosen to marry. A man without a shilling. A poor accountant in the city. A person whom, had he called to speak to me on business, I should not have allowed to sit down in my presence; who, at the present moment, only stands in my hall on sufferance."

Standing in her hall on sufferance, George had, nevertheless, the best of the position. It was, perhaps, a conviction of this fact that made Mrs. Elsenham try her best to humble him in the presence of her servants.

But the accountant was not a man to be humbled by any remarks of hers. He was not a person to bandy words with an angry woman; and he stood leaning against the hall table, with his hat in his hand, listening in as calm a silence to her passionate ravings as though he had been born deaf and dumb.

The only sentence he spoke in the house was addressed to his wife.

"Beryl," he said, "I wish you would get your things quickly, or we shall miss our train."

"By Jove," observed the butler, subsequently, to a select company assembled in the servants' hall, "it's a thousand pities he has n't got no money, if so be he has n't, as the old cat says, which is a subject that I entertains my doubts on myself. I never see — and all here is aware this is the smallest establishment with which I have ever been connected — a gentleman conduct himself better under aggravation than Mr. Geith. Mentioning which, everybody knows, Geith to be a good name, whether in the City or the West End.

And so 'ere's to Miss Molozane's 'ealth, Mrs. Geith as now is."

"He is worth fifty of that other skinflint, missus wanted her to take," added the footman. "He tipped me half a sov. for getting him a cab, as readily as that other d——d fool would a curse."

"If so be he could have paved the steps with gold, for her to walk out over, he'd a done it," said the butler. From which observations it may be inferred that George had not spared his purse, nor its contents either, in the course of his exit from Mrs. Elsenham's abode.

"I am so thankful not to have to go through that again," remarked Beryl, with a sigh of relief, as she nestled down in the cab beside her husband. "George, are we going straight to the station, because I am *so* hungry. I have not had a scrap of breakfast yet."

"My poor little wife," said the new-made husband, laughing, "neither have I;" and he put his head out of the cab window, and told the man to pull up at the door of an hotel, which they were just then passing.

There was something so comical about neither of them having had a morsel to eat, and about both proving most genuinely and unsentimentally ready for a substantial breakfast, that Beryl soon recovered her spirits, and made George laugh, in spite of himself, at Mrs. Elsenham's virtuous indignation.

"Poor Granny," finished the incorrigible young lady, "she will miss me for a day or two, and then she will either get some poor soul of a companion to tyrannize over, or else take Tilly back into favor, perhaps do both. Any how, she has done with me now, except, perhaps, 'to point a moral or adorn a tale.' How astonished Tilly will be to hear of my performances. Granny has sent for her, I am certain, and the two are sitting together, calling down fire from heaven on my head. And as for your's, I wonder it is on your

shoulders. How could you take it so coolly? I admired you beyond everything for your sublime indifference."

"We have lost our train, Beryl," suggested her husband, "and if you do not make haste we shall miss another."

"I suppose," said Beryl, when they were fairly seated in the railway carriage, and rattling by express along the South-Western line, — "I suppose I shall never have any free will again as long as I live. I suppose I shall have to do what you tell me now forever and forever."

"Should you like to take back your freedom?" he asked gravely; "are you sorry you have married me? Are you positive you did not decide too hastily? that you love me really and truly, as much as I love you?"

For a minute she did not answer; she looked out of the window at the hedges, and trees, and fields, and houses, as the train sped on. She went back and back over the years she had known this man, who was now her husband, ere she said, —

"George, I will tell you something, if you promise not to let it make you vain."

"I will try not to be too much uplifted by the secret, whatever it may be," he answered.

"I have been thinking about how long I have liked you," she said, with her sweet face hidden on his shoulder; "and, though I am not certain, still I believe I would have married you months, and months, and months before we left the Dower House, if you had asked me."

"Thank you, Beryl," and he kissed her with a feeling of something very like reverence; "thank you, and may God bless you, my darling! for your innocent love and unquestioning trust."



## CHAPTER XLI.

## IN THE CITY.

As a rule, there is nothing so romantic as love-making. As a rule, likewise, there is nothing so prosaic as matrimony.

Lovemaking is fairyland ; marriage but a home of which some make a good thing, and others an evil.

Love-making is the evening entertainment, with the lamps lighted, and the scenery shifting, and the actresses and actors making their best speeches, singing their sweetest songs ; whilst matrimony is the nailing and hammering and actual language of every-day life.

Love-making is the Spanish castle of youth, filled with grand furniture, soft couches, sweet flowers, gushing fountains, singing birds, pleasant perfumes, tenanted by a dream woman, dressed in impossible garments, wreathed with smiles, living for one person and one alone, utterly lifted above the sphere of ordinary existence, and consequently far beyond the consideration of mundane affairs.

Matrimony, on the contrary, is the eight or ten roomed house of manhood, with one of Broadwood's second-hand pianos in the drawing-room, linen covers on the stair-carpeting, oil-cloth and an umbrella-stand in the hall, a pervading smell of dinner in every nook and corner, with a woman, just like any other woman, sitting by the domestic hearth, darning stockings while she thinks of the peculations of her cook, or the short-comings of her housemaid.

And yet to the terrible reality of the latter picture there

are occasional exceptions — exceptions which, it may be, prove the rule.

If he had married her in the days of his prosperity, if he had taken her for wife as any other Christian would when he possessed a comfortable competence, and the means of providing her with the eight or ten roomed house and appendages, of some of which I have made honorable mention, if he had taken her from among the Dower House roses to a suburban residence, whence he would have journeyed into the city every morning by omnibus; and when they would daily have formed commonplace acquaintances, and learnt to take an interest in the goings and comings of their next-door neighbors, I think the romance would soon have been rubbed off their lives, and that they might have become in course of time intensely respectable, amazingly uninteresting.

As it was, however, if their love-making was sadly prosaic, if their wedding was fearfully matter-of-fact, if they had learnt beforehand, that, without a shadow of doubt, it was as man and woman, not as hero and heroine, they were taking one another for better for worse; if, through adverse circumstances, they were cheated out of something which falls to the lot of most people, and which must find it pleasant to look back upon through all the cares and troubles of after-life, they had yet by way of a balance, romance in matrimony, and such happiness, spite of all their anxieties, as does not as a rule go home with those couples, whose marriage has been conducted on the strictest principles of domestic economy, and whose settlements, on both sides, have met with the approval of parents and guardians, and the warmest congratulations of friends.

Never a man had courage to marry on smaller means than the accountant of Fen Court. No woman ever, with her eyes open, wedded to greater poverty, to closer economy, than Beryl Molozone, and yet, having health and hope and one another, the pair held that they were happy; and if the proof of the pudding be in the eating, they were right.

In the whole of London, — east, west, north and south, — there could not have been found, I think, a more contented, more united couple, than Mr. and Mrs. Geith, of Catherine Court — for it was in Catherine Court the newly-married pair in due time took up their abode; and if you want to find the quiet little nook which rejoices in the above unmelodious name, I can only say it used to lie, and for aught I know to the contrary, lies still, close to Savage Gardens, Tower Hill, Trinity Square, Muscovy Court, Great Tower Street, Seething Lane, Fenchurch Street.

Within five minutes' walk of George's office, better than a palace in the country, were their modest apartments in Catherine Court to the young wife.

He could come home for dinner now. No housekeeper made any more tea for the accountant in the days of which I write. After office-hours were over, Beryl carried her work across to Fen Court, and sewed there whilst her husband finished his work. When he had a leisure evening they had long walks through the city — long walks in the gaslight, where they explored forsaken courts, and found out the queerest houses and lanes imaginable.

Without friends, without relations, without even acquaintances, the two Ishmaelites delighted in their life. They had not the opinions of the world to consider. If they paid their landlady regularly, it did not signify to her how many courses they had for dinner, or whether, indeed, they had any dinner at all, only the less cooking they required the better she was pleased. There were no old friends to make lamentation over "poor Beryl's shocking choice," no relations to mourn about "dear George having married a penniless girl when he might have looked higher."

They were, happy mortals, alone in the world; alone for better, for worse, for joy or for sorrow: and as there was no one to come between them, no one to put notions in the head of either, they were all the world to one another.

The struggle, too, for necessaries, the necessity for pinch-

ing and contriving drew them daily closer and closer. The man had to work hard ; and Beryl could not afford to be idle either. How she revelled in George's wardrobe ; how triumphantly she brought old goods to light, and made them with her busy fingers new again. What an achievement it was to be able to save laying out a sovereign. What a bright, cheerful little wife it was, who, day after day, sat at the window, thimble on finger, needlework in hand, waiting and watching for the return of her husband, who looked up at her from the time he entered the court till she left her seat and ran down-stairs to greet him.

Of such a life there cannot, of necessity, be much to tell. Of happiness a writer can rarely find much to say, and yet I had fain linger over those days, which were the brightest they ever knew. As for Royal, never in his life had he been surrounded by such swarms of devoted admirers as in the city. Whether he sauntered out for a morning ramble in the neighborhood of Catherine Court, whether he accompanied Beryl to the shops where she dealt, whether he marched beside George to Fen Court, whether he lay stretched on the pavement before the office-door, or gravely kept watch and ward over the accountant's papers, he still met with some flattering remark, some complimentary observation.

Had he been an alderman, the citizens could not have catered for him more zealously. Wherever he went he got something to eat ; and he took all the refreshment which was offered to him as a king might have accepted tribute. Women, after the manner of the sex, called him "poor fellow," and laid their hands upon him respectfully ; then stopped to remark what a fine dog he was, whilst children idolized him. A happy day it was for the juvenile fry when Royal took up his abode amongst them ; and amongst the commonest of every-day sights was it to see a crowd of children gathered about the entrance to Catherine Court, and talking to the dog as if he were a human being, and could understand every word they said.

Generally, there was a little girl of some two or three years old, clasping his great neck, and calling him her own nice toby Oyal. If any one had stolen him, I think the thief could not long have escaped detection ; had any harm happened to him, the population would have donned some kind of mourning ; but as it was, no evil came to him, and the dog walked about, the delight and ornament of the neighborhood in which he dwelt.

Once, and once only, Mrs. Richard Elsenham penetrated to Catherine Court. She came in her carriage, and the horses ran the risk of their lives in the middle of a block in Fenchurch Street.

Her coachman tried Great Tower Street, going back by way of a change ; but finding that worse, plunged into still deeper depths of misery in Lower Thames Street, from which place he was only too glad to emerge by the time he got to Fish Street Hill.

"Good God, Beryl!" exclaimed the fine lady, surprised into vehemence by fright and astonishment, "what can induce Mr. Geith to let you live in a place like this. Stock Orchard Crescent was princely in comparison."

"My dear Matilda, don't distress yourself, it does very well indeed for me," answered Beryl. "If I have not got a very magnificent house, there is peace in it ; if my husband be not rich, and is forced to work hard, he loves me better than anything else in the world, and spends every leisure moment with me."

Which speech left Mrs. Geith very decidedly the winner, for Mr. Elsenham's house was not the abode of peace, and he did not love his wife, and he never remained with her for a moment, when he could get away.

"And do not come to see me again, Tilly," said Beryl, at parting, "for it is only running the chance of offending grandmamma, and incurring the certainty of annoying yourself. We will write to one another ; is not that enough ? We have each chosen our path, and mine leads me far away from you."

“If you believe me, she looks absolutely happy,” said Mrs. Richard Elsenham when speaking of her visit to her grandmother; “and she seems to think she is better off than she was here, poor deluded creature.”

“I suppose she was not deluded in one respect,” remarked Mrs. Elsenham, dryly. “The man must have been fond of her.”

Fond of her! was fond any word to use about the matter? If Mrs. Elsenham had been able to look down into George Geith's heart she would have found that there was no George Geith left there, that it was all Beryl, nothing else.

He loved her as such men do love, when they meet with something worth lavishing their affections on, idolatrously; and it is not too much to say that he would more cheerfully have died for her than lived without her.

What if she had lost something of her old elasticity, of her girlish light-heartedness? Did she seem any the less lovable to him because, in watching beside sickness, in walking among graves, she had learnt there was trouble in this life as well as joy?

And now, in any mood, sorrowful or gay, Beryl appeared charming to the man with whom she had linked her lot; whilst on her side she could not find a fault save one, viz., that as time went on she saw a certain sadness clouding her husband's face — a wistful, anxious look abiding in his eyes.

What might be the cause of his trouble Beryl could not imagine: business seemed going much as usual; if Mr. Foss had taken some of her husband's customers, her husband seemed, nevertheless, to have as much work as he was able to get through.

Gradually their walks grew fewer, her evening visits to Fen Court more frequent, yet still he kept always complaining some persons' books were falling behind, that it was an awful nuisance the days were not forty-eight hours long, and so on.

“Could not a clerk help you?” she ventured one evening,

after he had wearily repeated the same old story, when she was sitting beside his office-fire and he continuing the same monotonous round of addition as had been his lot for years.

"I can't afford to have one just at present," he answered.

"And could not I be of any use, George? I am a terrible stupid, I know, and as slow as a canal-boat; but still, in the course of the day I surely could manage to get through what would be only an hour or two's work for you."

"I think my darling has plenty to do as it is," he answered, and he came over beside her as he spoke.

"I have nothing to do," she replied, eagerly, — "nothing from morning till night, and I should so enjoy being useful, George, it would be such fun to play at business. Will you let me try? give me a task," she added, laughing, "till you see if I can accomplish it."

But spite of her entreaties he would not find her any work; he insulted her handwriting and scoffed at her knowledge of figures; he ridiculed the idea of his little girl, his own Beryl, developing into a hard-headed, business woman, with city phrases ready on the tip of her tongue, and no subjects of conversation except the price of money, and the chances of lower discounts; and finally, after he had mocked at the proposition for about five minutes, and laughed the idea of useful employment out of her head, he went back to his desk, and mounted his stool, and turned over the page, and commenced laboring away at another column.

So the time went by, till Beryl, wearying of her own occupation, put aside her stitching, and crossing her hands idly in her lap, began looking into the fire, and finally fell a musing.

How long she sat thus she never knew; but something, she could not exactly tell what, roused her at length from her meditations, and made her look suddenly towards her husband.

Probably, though she was seated with her back to his desk, she felt by that quiet instinct which seems intuitive to

woman, that he had ceased work, that he was engaged in some way different from usual, for when she turned she saw he had pushed his papers aside, and was leaning forward, with his hands resting on the desk and his head lying on them.

“George, are you ill? For mercy’s sake speak to me. George, what is the matter? whatever it may be don’t keep it from me.”

She was beside him as she spoke, she twined her arms round his neck, she put her face down to his, and would have kissed him, but that he turned his cheek from her caress.

“My darling, what is it? what have I done? what is the matter?” and she tore his hands away in her desperation, to see that he was crying like a child.

“Oh, George! oh, my love, my love!” and she drew his head towards her, and laid his face on her shoulder, and let him sob out his trouble there, asking no question more.

By degrees he told her all, however; how his wearied brain refused to work longer at his bidding, how his figures confused him, how his old correctness, his former certainty, had been leaving him day by day; how it had lately taken him an hour to get through the business he had formerly been able to manage easily in ten minutes; how, in fact, for the second time in his city career, his capital had gone from him.

“First money, then health,” he said, as with trembling hands he tried to arrange his papers and put them together in his usual orderly manner. “And what is to become of us without either? God only knows, I do not.”

Religious sentiments, Scriptural quotations, had never come very readily to Beryl Molozane, but a thought passed through her mind that the God her husband spoke of had provided, — that He would provide.

Yet for her life Beryl could not have put this feeling into words, and she could only say, —

“George, dear, do not be downhearted. Come home,



and have a good night's sleep, and do not work so hard for a day or two. For one thing, to-morrow will be Sunday ; are you not thankful to remember that ? ”

“ If it had not been for Sundays,” answered George, and as he spoke he had a jumble of Deuteronomy and the French Revolution, and a whole host of other things mixed up in his head together, — “ if it had not been for Sundays, I should have been dead long ago.”

“ Well, then, let us both be thankful for them,” she said ; “ and do not be dispirited. Then let me add it up,” and Beryl slowly and painfully worked her way to the top of the column. “ What did you make it, George ? That is quite right, you see. What nonsense you have been talking. I believe you are half asleep already. Put away your things, and let us get home at once.”

Dear heart, tender wife, with her own spirit sinking, she could scold him hopefully thus !

When, in the great day of eternal reckoning, the names of the real heroes of this world are revealed, I think and hope and believe it will be found that love, true love, has made the stanchest martyrs, the bravest men and women out of, to our thinking, the unlikeliest materials, the most arrant cowards.

## CHAPTER XLII.

## A LITTLE DISCOVERY.

LIKE many another wise adviser, Beryl did not follow, in her own person, the admirable counsel she had given to her husband, for it struck five o'clock on Sunday morning before she closed her eyes.

Thinking — thinking wearily and hopelessly — Beryl lay awake the whole night long, wondering, as many an anxious wife has wondered before and since, how she could help her husband; how, with her poor strength, she might manage to keep the wheels of his business from rolling back down the hill he had managed to mount so far. How could she do it? How could she, who had not brought him friends, or money, or connection, aid him now? Over and over the same old ground she went, till she grew mortally sick of traversing it; plan after plan she perfected and discarded, till even her young head ached with its unwonted exertions. She could do nothing; she was not clever; she had no talent of any kind; she might take in needlework, to be sure; but then what could she earn at needlework? She might teach young children; she might establish a little school, that the fry of small boys and girls belonging to the people in the neighborhood could, perhaps, in time, be induced to attend; but if she did, what then? Would her work satisfy her husband? What, to come back to the original question, was he to do? What plan, what reasonable, hopeful plan for the future, could she suggest to him?

If he looked out for a situation as book-keeper, and got

one, he would have to labor away at figures still. No matter what post he occupied in the city, accounts would, she knew, form some portion of his daily work ; and if he were in another man's employment, those accounts would have to be got through ill or well ; further, would George ever be able to bear being at the beck and call of any employer ; he who had, for so long a time, known no master save himself and necessity.

Could he not try something different from the business of an accountant ? She would ask him the very first opportunity ; she really thought he might, and wondered the idea had not occurred to him. Surely there were at least a thousand different ways for a man to earn his bread in London, and it would be hard, indeed, if one like George starved in the midst of plenty.

He must give up accounts, that was all ; and Beryl, on the strength of this simple arrangement, fell fast asleep.

When, however, she unfolded her scheme to her husband, he regarded it as so utterly impracticable that Beryl's hopes sunk again below zero.

"It is all very well to say, 'Do something else ;' but what else am I to do ? Every business requires, at least, a small amount of capital, and a considerable amount of knowledge. But do not let us talk about it now, Beryl ; let us take the day of rest for rest."

Beryl was not able to do it ; she could hold her tongue ; she could cease worrying her husband ; she could talk to him on other subjects, but she could not divert her thoughts from the one great trouble which had fallen upon them both.

In church she heard very little of the service, except such portions as referred to those who were in sorrow and in great distress ; and as they walked along the streets she looked at every warehouse, wondering if George could not possibly commence in some impossible trade, and make his fortune in a week or two.

When in the afternoon he lay on the sofa in their little

sitting-room fast asleep, Beryl, instead of reading, as was her wont, sat by the window marvelling when help would come.

“Had they not better emigrate?” she asked herself; “could they not clear a place in the woods for themselves, and build a log-house, and live happy ever afterwards?”

But then, alas! people were unable to emigrate without going over the sea, and Beryl had been so horribly sick even in crossing to the Isle of Wight, that if her husband's business had not compelled his return to Fen Court, Beryl would have stayed on the Island all her life sooner than undergo such misery again.

“I should never live to see land,” thought this wretched little sailor, “if I went to New Zealand, or Australia, or America, or any of those places that are thousands of miles away; besides, emigrating requires money, too,” she recollected, gleefully rejoiced to find that the same objection held good against the plans she disliked as against the plans she advocated. Could not George rest for a little while? she asked herself, only to recollect next minute that if he rested he would lose his connection. Would it be hopeless for her to try to help him? Beryl was willing to do what lay in her power, but with all her good will she recoiled from the idea of addition. In her heart she felt she could undergo any torture for George, run any risk, face any danger, submit to any privation, but addition; Beryl's courage ebbed away at that idea, slunk off at the very notion, like a coward.

Still the wife thought on, casting about in every direction for some straw to seize. During the whole of Sunday, and for many a weary hour after she laid her head on the pillow at night, Beryl pondered where she could turn for help.

Monday morning came, and the accountant went back to his drudgery again. Monday night arrived, and once more Beryl sat in his office waiting till he had forced himself to finish his work, till he should be willing to go home.

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday came, bringing with them fresh toil, increasing weariness, and Beryl was thinking that if the strain were continued much longer she should not be able to reduce it either, when suddenly out of the darkness a light at last flashed forth. She had one friend, who might be willing to help her in her need — Mr. Finch.

Quite in a flutter of excitement, Beryl laid aside her work, put on her bonnet, and started off to Fore Street. She would not speak to her husband first; he might object, he might argue, he might a hundred things, and Beryl was not going to be kept back from running after this light, let the consequences prove what they chose. If she could not trust to her own sense in a matter of this kind, in what matter could she trust it? And Beryl, having finished this neat little argument satisfactorily, found herself before the door of Mr. Finch's great warehouse in a state of such breathless excitement, that she had to walk on as far as Jewin Crescent and back again before she felt it would be prudent for her to solicit an interview.

Mr. Finch was in. Mr. Finch remembered his visitor in a moment, and God blessed himself to any extent at sight of her.

He had heard of her father's death, had attended his funeral, indeed, but he had not heard of her marriage, and was greatly surprised at the news in consequence.

"So she had married the gentleman who was down arranging her father's affairs, — a very nice, intelligent kind of person he seemed to be too."

"You know," added Mr. Finch, "we all thought you would have had pity on poor Wern; it was a sad thing you could not like him; but as you did not like him, you did the right thing, Mrs. Geith: that is what my sister and I often said. How surprised she will be, to be sure!"

At which point Mrs. Geith ventured to remind him of the object of her visit.

"It's odd now, ain't it?" answered Mr. Finch, when he

had brought back his thoughts from the days when the Molozaues and he were near neighbors, "that I had a gentleman in with me three times within as many weeks, wanting my advice about the sale of a little apparatus he exhibited at the Great Show in Hyde Park. He has a business, a good business, in Stockport, which it would not pay him anyhow to leave, and so he wants somebody to push his invention in London. It's a first-rate thing so far as I am a judge — a thing I would take up myself if I had not my hands too full already. He is in town now; he is stopping at Miller's Hotel, in Bow Lane, and I will send down and tell him I want to see him in the morning. We can call on Mr. Geith if you like. There is no doubt but he can have the agency, supposing he likes to take it."

"Mr. Finch, would you mind calling on my husband, without saying anything about having seen me?" asked Beryl, who was all of a tremble at the thought of what she had done, and of how George would take it.

"Not a bit of it," returned Mr. Finch, heartily; "I am only too glad to do you a good turn, if it lays in my power. You are not looking as well as you might do yourself; you ought to come down to Withesfell, and get the color back in your cheeks. I have often and often been wondering where you were and what had become of you, but I certainly never expected to see you here, — never."

"Now you have seen me here, though," answered Beryl, "you will do your best to help me, — won't you, Mr. Finch?"

"Indeed I will; if one thing fails, another shall not fail," said Mr. Finch, heartily; and having received this assurance, Beryl walked back to Catherine Court in such a transport of delight that it was well George's clients detained him at his office past the usual hour, or he would have marvelled what had occurred to make his wife so joyful.

Next day, when he came in to dinner, he told her Mr. Finch and Mr. Bidwell from Stockport had called at his office to offer him a first-rate agency.

"Mr. Bidwell will pay the rent of an office and warehouse, and a clerk's salary," finished Mr. Geith, "and if I cannot make a clear four hundred a year out of his invention, I am greatly mistaken."

"When will it be settled, George?" she asked.

"I am to see them again to-morrow," he said; "and if we arrange satisfactorily, I will tell my little wife what I intend doing. The first-floor below here, you understand, is to let, and the basement as well; now I thought if I could take the whole house from the landlord, retaining the present ground-floor tenant, we could get rid of Mrs. Grims and live with the business."

"Oh, George, how delicious!"

"Are you sure you would not find it dull?"

"Dull, so near you!"

"I was wondering this morning, Beryl, what I could do — what the end of it all would be — for I knew it was impossible for me to continue my present business. It was so strange Mr. Finch thinking of me; was it not, Beryl?"

She could keep it from him no longer. It was impossible she could conceal her part in the affair forever. So she threw herself on his neck, and weeping and laughing, told him of her visit to Fore Street; of the fortunate moment at which it was timed.

"I was so wretched, George, and I was afraid you would prevent my going," she finished.

"And I am so glad, Beryl, and so thankful you went."

From that time forth, till the day arrived when they removed into Fen Court, the young wife was in a fever of excitement.

She had never done talking about ways and means, about carpets, about furniture, about a servant. If George had not loved her very dearly, if he had not longed for a home, if the idea of setting up his household goods in Fen Court had not been quite as pleasing to him as it was to Beryl, he would have wearied of her chatter, and been unsympathetic.

ing in her delight; but, as it was, the relief was to him so great, the idea of having a house of their own seemed to both so charming, that the two were like a pair of children rejoicing over a new plaything.

If, in the old days departed, any one had suggested a home to him in Fen Court, a wife who would be willing to reside in a house which commanded a view over the trees in the churchyard, on the one side, and over the pavement of Billiter Square, on the other, George Geith would have laughed the idea to scorn; but, by this time, he was taught the great truth, that happiness is to be found in very unlikely places, and that, with Beryl and contentment, a hut was as good as a palace, an office in the city as a mansion in the country.

Catherine Court had been well enough, but Fen Court was better still. A wife in the next street had once seemed too much happiness for the accountant; but a wife on the premises, a wife separated from him by no sloppy pavements, whom he could always lay his hand on, was bliss unspeakable.

His old offices and the housekeeper's former quarters were the territories he made over to Beryl; whilst he himself moved into the first-floor; and, finally, as business increased, took the ground-floor into his own possession as well.

As when he changed his banking account to Norton's, everything prospered with him, so, now when he added another business to his former profession, George Geith made money in handfuls.

Backed by a principal whose pet child he was nursing to maturity, aided by Mr. Finch, and encouraged by Mr. Finch's connections, the business road seemed to the accountant bordered by flowers, carpeted with roses.

True, now, as formerly, he had to work hard; but what of that? His hard work now was done by clerks; his own personal work was seeing principals, canvassing for orders, and making sure that those orders were duly executed.



"If Bidwell had stopped his mill, and dismissed his hands, and come to London himself to have pushed this here patent," said Mr. Finch, "he could not have made the trade you have; and I can only say this, Mr. Geith, I respects a man as works as you do, and if I can put anything in your way, I will, as sure as my name is what it is."

To which George replied that he thought Mr. Finch had done quite enough, and that he was grateful, and more than grateful, for his kindness.

"I brought Bidwell for the sake of your wife, and because of the friendship I felt for her father; but what I do for the future I will do for you, Mr. Geith, and there is my hand on it."

"I really do not know how to thank you," said the accountant, earnestly.

"There is no necessity for thanks," replied Mr. Finch; "and I tell you what, when the fine weather comes, you and your wife must take a run down to Withefell, and stay for a fortnight or so at the hall. We only live in a plain way, as you know, but what I can offer, you are heartily welcome to."

Meantime, was Beryl idle? By no means. There were fifty trifling ways in which she could assist her husband now.

Although he had two clerks, still she was the trustiest of all; one who would never tell about his business, never discuss the contents of a private letter, never spoke of the extent of his trade. Little by little, Beryl came to have more to do with the business. By degrees, she learnt how to arrange his papers, how to keep his bills, his invoices, his receipt-notes, and his letters, so that at any minute she could find him a particular account, or tell him where such and such a proposal was put.

What a relief George found it, not to have to waste his time in such little matters, may perhaps be estimated by those who, having no confidential clerk "behind their hand,"

are compelled to sort out every private document as they want it, and to spend valuable minutes in turning over old letters and upsetting everything in their office to find one solitary account.

By Beryl's aid not a moment was unprofitable, not an hour needed to be employed without a return of some kind. If she could do nothing to make money, she at least prevented her husband losing time, which to him was money; and knowing she was usefully occupied, the young wife felt no weariness; she rather liked the eternal job of tidying and making straight than otherwise.

Until one day, one sorrowful, mournful day arrived, after which Beryl hated the sight of papers and letters forever.

George was out; he had left her, at her own urgent request, some boxes, tin boxes, the contents whereof required arrangement. She told him she wanted "amusement," and for "amusement" he told her to sort out all the letters she could find, and place them, according to date and name, in a certain cupboard, fitted up with alphabetical pigeon-holes, which the busy accountant had recently had put up in one corner of his own personal and especial first-floor office.

"Then I am not to mark the names on the back of any of them?" inquired Beryl.

"No; you had better range them alphabetically on the table, and then put them in the pigeon-holes according to date. And lock the door inside while you are down here, and take the key up-stairs with you when you are tired of sorting."

With which final injunction George Geith left the office and went out.

Very patiently Beryl pursued her task, making but little progress, however, for she found occasionally much trouble in deciphering the signatures, and altogether she was never rapid in such matters. One cause for which might, perhaps, be found in the fact that she was so much afraid of making mistakes. All the heaps had to be reexamined, and

least once in five minutes, lest, by any accident, she had put a B among the O's, or an R amongst the C's.

A woman playing at business like a child. A good, dear, little soul, faithful in her voluntary labor, industrious in her self-imposed task. Still the same pretty Beryl, amongst whose hair the sunbeams had glared in the old days in Hertfordshire. It almost seemed as though the sun knew it was the girl he had shone on in the far-off country, who now sat a wife in a London office, for he streamed his rays down into Fen Court, and looked through the window of the room she occupied, and turned every lock and tress of Beryl's luxuriant hair to gold.

Dear, light-hearted, true, loving, hopeful wife ! who was never to be light-hearted more ; who was never again to look at the fields, and the woods, and the trees with eyes unclouded by sorrow ; from whose daily life all perfect faith, all unalloyed happiness, were blotted out that day.

It was the accountant's most private papers (the reader must remember) that Beryl was now engaged in arranging ; and how happy the present must have been to him, how completely the past sorrow must have been swept away from his memory, may be imagined from the fact of his having forgotten, that amongst those letters of his lonelier existence, there lay one on which he would not have had his wife's eyes rest for any earthly advantage that could have been offered to him.

There it lay, tossed in amongst a mess of other epistles, was the letter which had brought liberty with it to the accountant of Fen Court.

Years had come and gone since then ; he had won, he had lost, he had succeeded again ; he had loved, he had married, he had grown almost young under the influence of his newly-found happiness. He had forgotten the old skeleton, and behold ! now were the dry, dead bones, clothed with vitality, with the power of making the living wretched, lying ready to Beryl's hand.

"The Rev. George Geith." It was this first aroused her curiosity. The Rev. George Geith; did that mean her husband's father? Beryl wondered as she pulled the papers out of their envelope, and looked at them, just as George Geith looked at them that summer night when the reader stood for the first time in Fen Court, gazing at the graves, listening to the low murmuring of the wind amongst the trees.

Joy came to him then : sorrow came to Beryl now. She read, and she re-read till she understood it all ; till she comprehended that she had never possessed her husband's confidence ; that the veriest stranger who came into his office knew as much about his antecedents as his wife. She had given her past, her future, her present, to him ; she had given her heart, her young fresh innocent heart, with its stores of love ; with its capacity for endurance ; with its hopefulness, its faith, its trust, its truth, to a man who had never hinted that his life held a secret he wished to keep from her knowledge.

Down amongst the letters Beryl buried that secret deep ; she thrust it to the very bottom of the box, and piled the other papers on it.

Then she arose, and with a mist before her eyes, with a cloud between her and the sunshine, groped her way to the door, like one blind.

How she managed to lock the door, and take out the key, and mount the stairs, and get back into her own room, Beryl never knew ; she was only certain that she had done so, because when she came to her senses again, she found herself lying on the floor in her bedchamber with the key in her hand, and Royal whining beside her.

Not without difficulty she contrived to stagger to a chair, where she sat till the servant, happening to come downstairs, she told her to go out and fetch a doctor, — the first she could meet with.

"For if this be not death," thought the poor lonely child,

as she laid her head back on the rail of the chair, "it is as like as anything I can imagine."

Into the smiling valley of her life an avalanche had descended; there was nothing she looked at now which bore the same aspect as it had a few hours previously; and for the first time Beryl felt that her misery was greater than she could bear, that the shock had been too much for her, that if help did not come, and come speedily, she should die.

If George had killed a man, and kept it from her, she could have borne it; if he had robbed any one and held back the secret, she could have forgiven it; if he had told her this piece of his past experience, she could have got over it in time; but to have thought he confided in her, to have loved him, worked for him, and to be repaid by such a discovery. Beryl grew dizzy as she remembered it, and passionately and despairingly she mourned that she had ever married, that she had no strength left to go away and separate herself from him forever.

She was not angry, she was hurt; the blow had crushed her heart, and in a dull, stupid, helpless way she bemoaned her fate, and thought bitterly about the weary days to come, now that faith and trust were gone.

She had believed so implicitly, she had loved so devotedly; and now — and now this was the end of it; she would never believe, nor hope, nor trust again.

As she arrived at this conclusion she felt something touch her hand. It was Royal.

"The only one who loves me in the world," she moaned; "the only one who is faithful to me now."

And she broke out crying; and all hardness and all despair melted away as she wept — as memories of the old happy days rose before her — as doubts concerning the justice of her own conclusions arose in her mind.

Blessed tears! when the day of their common trouble came, Beryl thanked God for having taken all wounded pride, all hard judgments out of her heart; she thanked Him

that in that hour of bitter trial He had not left her to herself, nor suffered her love to die out, nor permitted her affections to become estranged from her husband.

She felt thankful that, though she could not avoid looking at the matter through a woman's prejudiced eyes, another light had still been thrown upon the subject which softened every harsh feature of the ugly fact; and that during the short period in which they two were permitted to tread life's path together, no shadow stood betwixt them more.

Her trust might be gone, but her love was strengthened; perfect happiness might never be dreamed of for the future. But in trouble, in sorrow, in anxiety, Beryl discovered that true affection is perfected; that affection which does not last for time alone, but which endures, as poor humanity in its bitterest extremity fondly hopes, throughout all the countless ages of eternity.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

## NOT DEAD.

SLOWLY and wearily passed the hours of the summer day ; tired of thinking, tired of crying, tired of the weakness which overmastered her, tired of moving her aching head back and forward on the pillow, Beryl found at last employment and consolation in wondering how much longer her husband would remain away, in counting the minutes likely to elapse before the time of his probable return.

Whilst he was out of her sight, she could not help doubting him ; but she knew when once she heard his voice and looked in his face, and touched his hand, she should believe, spite of everything, that he loved her, and would love her till she died.

He had never seen her ill ; how would he bear it ? If he could only think how ill she was, the poor wife felt certain no business, no profit would keep him from her side. She wondered how he would take it, what he would say, what the doctor would tell him, how he would look when he saw her, whether he would suspect what she had discovered and read.

Beryl determined that if she could prevent it, he should never know she had found the letter, never learn that it was the shock of reading the secret of his life which had so nearly killed her. For Beryl believed it had nearly killed her, and she was right. Even as it was, she lay for days within sight of the "valley of the shadow," and when she came out of the darkness of the land, when George knew

that for a certainty she was to live and not to die, she brought back with her to the plains of earth a child, whose birth had almost left George a widower.

Through her long illness, through her tardy convalescence, her husband could scarcely bring himself to leave her side.

Did he love her?

In the lonely night-watches, in the weary hours of day, Beryl learnt better than to doubt a love which, as I have said before, was less affection than idolatry.

What if he had kept something back? supposing she had never become acquainted with that something, would it not have been happier for her? why should he have told her? where was the necessity? had he not a right to use his own discretion in the matter? what good could it have conferred by his repeating that old sorrowful story to her? what good had the perusal of it brought to her now? So Beryl, nursing her child, his child, and looking out into Fen Court, when the trees were dropping their leaves in the damp autumnal afternoon, thought and argued with herself, while George, all unconscious of what was passing through her mind, toiled in the office below for her and the son, who was now an additional incentive to labor.

What a pathos there is in the lives of these hard-working men! How sadly pathetic is the existence of that person who has no time to bemoan himself, who has no capability of working on the sympathy of his fellows.

Knowing what was coming to George Geith, aware of the existence of a shadow which was stealing onward and onward towards him, I cannot but pause for a moment and think of his toil, his industry, his disappointments, his amazing energy, before I go forward to the end.

He never pitied himself; he never cried out because his labor was severe, because the recompense was tardy. Had he stayed in the Church he would have thought more of writing one poor sermon a week, than he did now of all the mental work he went through in a day. Though he had



stuck to business till his mind refused to help him longer, he had never talked about his head, as one may hear, to the present day, any clergyman in a small parish raving about his poor weak brains. There is a cant which comes sooner or later to all professions ; when it comes to business, business will have grown self-conscious, and as uninteresting and wearisome to outsiders, as overworked lawyers and debilitated clergymen are now.

It is the sublime self-abnegation to business, the utter absence of anything subjective in its votaries, the complete forgetfulness of all physical laws, the ever-present remembrance of a stern necessity which invests the poorest tradesman who wearily treads the London pavements with a pathetic, but with a human interest.

Am I tedious ? If so, it is because I am loath to proceed with my story, because I am sorry to tell of the news which Mr. Tettin brought ere long to the office in Fen Court.

"I have called to give you a piece of, I fear, rather unpleasant information," said the lawyer, seating himself by the blazing fire, and keeping his face turned steadily away from George Geith as he spoke.

"Snareham is in the market."

"I saw the preliminary advertisement in the *Times* yesterday," was the reply ; and George Geith looked inquiringly at the lawyer.

"You can do nothing, you know," remarked the latter.

"I am aware of that," answered the other ; and there ensued an awkward pause which Mr. Tettin broke by stating, "That he had lately met, strangely enough, with a person whose name possessed some little interest for Mr. Geith — Mr. Clayfield."

"Clayfield !— do you know the honorable and reverend and so on gentleman with whom we had that agreeable correspondence some years back ?" and George came close up to the fire and looked anxiously in Mr. Tettin's face.

"The same ; and now I am going to tell you a very

curious and extraordinary thing: Mr. Clayfield never wrote those letters we received."

"You don't mean it, Mr. Tettin?"

"But I do. I had it from his own lips yesterday."

"Good God!" exclaimed the accountant; and he fell back into a chair, as if some one had fired a pistol at him.

"I thought the sooner you knew this the better," said the lawyer; "and so I came into the city on purpose to tell you."

No man knew better than George Geith that Mr. Tettin would not have announced this little fact without some sufficient reason; so he asked, —

"Why could you not have sent for me? why did you come?"

"Well, the fact is," replied Mr. Tettin, "and a very singular fact it seems to me, that about a fortnight ago there was a person called at my office and asked my head clerk if he knew your whereabouts. I was out at the time."

"And that person was a woman?" suggested George.

"That person was a woman," acquiesced Mr. Tettin, "and but for her visit I should most probably never have thought of saying anything to Mr. Clayfield about the matter. The whole affair came round very curiously. I had been recommended to him by a friend of his and a client of my own; and after we had been talking over the business which brought him to me for some time, he pulled out the correspondence that had taken place between him and the person against whom he wanted me to proceed, and laying it before me, said, 'My handwriting is not very legible, Mr. Tettin; so if you like I will read it over for you.'"

"'Thank you,' said I, 'but I have managed to read it before, and I can surely read it again.'"

"'Why, where did you ever read it before?' he asked.

"'I saw it when you wrote to the Rev. George Geith.'"

"'The Reverend George Geith!' said he; 'I never heard of him in my life till this minute.'"

"Well, Mr. Geith," proceeded the lawyer; "I confess

that staggered me ; I am not very easily disconcerted, but really any one might have knocked me over with a feather."

"Did not Mrs. Geith die in your parish?" I asked; "did you not send first a letter stating she was dying; secondly, a telegraphic message, announcing her death; and thirdly, a certificate of her death and burial, to the Rev. George Geith, care of the person who now addresses you?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Clayfield; "I tell you I never heard of Mr. or Mrs. Geith till this moment, and I never heard of you, Mr. Tettin, till my friend [mentioned your name to me about a fortnight since."

"After that, Mr. Geith, I was very rude, and ran the risk of losing a good client, for I told him I could not believe that he was Mr. Clayfield at all, and I could not believe it; and I did not believe it, till he took me to an old acquaintance of my own, who assured me he was the Honorable Ferdinand Clayfield, and no other person."

"And what conclusion do you draw from all this?" asked George, slowly.

"That Mrs. Geith is living, and that if you are not remarkably fortunate, you will have the felicity of seeing her some day when you least look for her."

For a moment the accountant sat silent; but he said:

"Mr. Tettin, do you know I have married again?"

"Whew — ew — ew!" exclaimed the lawyer; and he rose in his dismay, and stood with his back to the fire, with his hands under his coat-tails.

"It was natural I should marry again, some time or other," observed George, angrily.

"Natural," acquiesced Mr. Tettin, "but unfortunate."

"As it has turned out," said the accountant; "but how the devil could I tell those letters were forgeries? how, in the name of hell, was I to know that the demon had concerted such a plot?"

"Now, now, my good sir," expostulated Mr. Tettin.

"What would you have?" demanded the accountant,

firmly; "with every hope of my future life wrecked, with not merely every hope of my own, but of hers, of hers, do you expect me to stop and weigh every word, to measure my sentences?"

"After all, however, she may not be living?" suggested the lawyer.

"May not!" repeated George, incredulously; "if she be not, who was it then that called at your office? No, Mr. Tettin, she will turn up, sooner or later; she and I will meet."

"Your name," remarked Mr. Tettin, "is now in the 'Post-Office Directory.'"

"Yes, knowing no fear, I have thrown aside all concealment; if she should go to you again, Mr. Tettin, ascertain her terms; I will pay anything, I will do anything to keep this from the knowledge of my wife, of Beryl."

"You will not tell her, then?"

"Tell her! could I break her heart? could I kill her? could I see her face change and change as it would change?" and George at this point rose and walked to the window, anxious to conceal an agitation which he was not willing for the lawyer to witness.

"You remember," said Mr. Tettin, as he rose to go, "that at the time we received these communications from Mr. Clayfield, I advised you to run down into Cornwall; I certainly did not consider such a proceeding indispensable, but I suggested it might be satisfactory."

"Well," said George, as Mr. Tettin paused, "have you come now to remind a fool of his folly?"

"No," was the answer; "I only mention that because it may perhaps plead my excuse for offering you a piece of disagreeable counsel now. Tell your — your present wife the whole of the circumstances, and separate."

"I can't do it," was the reply, faintly uttered. "Tell me to kill myself, and I may think of it; but whilst I have life I cannot leave Beryl."

"Then may God help you both!" said the lawyer, and he took George's hand and held it in his own for a moment ere he proceeded.

"I have never had any anything to do with divorce cases, but I think, I believe there are circumstances connected with this wretched affair which would enable you to obtain your freedom still."

"For heaven's sake," entreated George, "have mercy; make any compromise, give her any money, only let the matter be kept quiet. It would kill her," and he pointed upwards, "to know it; and moreover, Mr. Tettin, we have a son."

If the lawyer had said what was in his mind at the moment, he would have remarked, "Of course;" for it was quite in the usual routine of his experience to find that where sons were wanted they did not come, and that where they were *de trop*, they arrived in the natural order of events.

Certainly the son complicated matters; but in spite of this Mr. Tettin stuck to his text.

He advised George to tell his wife, and to strive for a divorce.

"And supposing I could not get one?" asked the accountant.

"I can more easily suppose that you could get one than that you could continue to live with your present wife, knowing your former one to be still alive," replied Mr. Tettin.

"I have no proof—I have no certainty," said the unhappy man; "and if I had proof—if I had certainty, I would keep the knowledge at all hazards from her. So long as the sorrow and the suffering can be borne by me alone, I am comparatively indifferent to it; but she must not know, and if I can help it she shall never know."

After that explicit statement, what could Mr. Tettin do but leave Fen Court quietly, marvelling at the perversity of human nature in general, and nature of lawyers' clients in particular?

## CHAPTER XLIV.

## THE TWO BARONETS.

WHILST the events recorded in the last few chapters were occurring in Fen Court, Sir Mark Geith had been rapidly treading the shortest road to ruin.

Some efforts he had made since we last saw him to retrieve his position ; but they were such poor, feeble, purposeless efforts, that day by day Snareham became involved more and more hopelessly, while the inevitable end — the end his cousin had prophesied so long before — came nearer and nearer.

Living on the Continent, Sir Mark had proved before to be little, if at all, cheaper than living in England.

Supposing a man able to leave his tastes and his extravagancies behind him in his native country, there may be some sense in his going abroad to retrench ; but if he carry every usual expense with him, if the same habits that have made him a pauper at home are kind enough to take passage with him across the channel, the result becomes, in the one case as in the other, a mere question of time ; and milor at Paris, at Rome, or the German baths, is as certain to parcel his family estate out to the dogs, as milor residing in princely style at his country seat, or in his town mansion in one of the London squares.

Money is easily spent all the world over, as easily spent as it is hardly earned ; and Sir Mark Geith, who had never earned a sovereign in his life, unless it might be on a horse-race, or at a gaming-house, discovered in due course that

Snareham must go ; that, if he did not sell it for himself, his creditors would do so for him.

Whether he could ever have managed to go through the ceremony of pushing the family estate with his own hand under the auctioneer's hammer, had Lady Geith held out a finger to help him in his distress, is doubtful ; but having discovered that assistance from her was not to be obtained by any legitimate means, the baronet one day started off in a passion for England, and forthwith gave instructions to his solicitor to insert that advertisement in the *Times* to which Mr. Tettin referred in his interview with the next of kin.

"And if that do not bring her ladyship to fork," said Sir Mark, as he folded up the *Times* and directed it to his mother, "nothing will."

Having arrived at which conclusion, he awaited the result, which did not prove exactly what he had anticipated.

Although it was the dead of winter, Lady Geith came direct to London ; and discovering, on her arrival there, that Sir Mark and his wife were not at Halkin Street, she proceeded without an hour's delay to Snareham Castle, when the baronet felt and evinced anything rather than pleasure at her unexpected appearance.

As for the baronet's wife, she made no secret of her apprehensions. "I told Mark how it would be," she sobbed, as she stood by the fire in her own apartment, which she had voluntarily relinquished for the benefit of Lady Géith ; "I said we ought to try and keep Snareham at all hazards. I am sure I would have made any sacrifice ; I would do anything now for the sake of peace and comfort. I have never known what it was to have a day's ease of mind since I married ; and if Mark had only let me go to you, and tell you everything at the time George wanted money, I am confident you would never have allowed us to be in such a strait as we are now."

"George wanted money ! *when* did George want mon-

ey?" and Lady Geith was a spectacle worth contemplating as she turned round and asked this question.

"Why, he wanted money at the time that bank failed, — at the time he was so ill."

"May the Lord have pity on me," said Lady Geith, as she buried her face in her hands; and aloud: "Righteous art Thou, O Lord: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether;" and she sate murmuring to herself for a minute or two longer, ere she said, sharply, — "Tell Mark to come to me; tell him I wish to speak to him at once."

"Will you not take some refreshment?" suggested the younger lady. "May I not order the" —

"Tell Mark to come to me; I have travelled from Nice to London, and from London here to see him, and him only; and I will neither eat or drink, I will neither take rest or sleep, till I have told him what I have journeyed all these miles to say."

"I am afraid it is all up, Cissy," remarked the baronet, when he received his mother's message; "but, perhaps, after she has rated me well, we may be better friends than has been the case for years past. At any rate, we cannot be worse, that is one comfort."

And Sir Mark walked off slowly to the presence-chamber, where he found Lady Geith standing beside the dressing-table, whilst her companion, Mrs. Lemon, sat looking with a sneer and a frown into the fire.

Observing her, Sir Mark suggested that what his mother had to say to him could perhaps be better communicated in private.

"When you hear what I am in England to tell you," answered Lady Geith, who was trembling from head to foot, "you will understand that to me it matters nothing whether my words be spoken in the market-place or in this room. I do not desire a witness to our conversation, but as Mrs. Lemon wishes to be present at it, I can make no objection to such an arrangement."



“Would it be vain for me to object?” asked the baronet.

“I think so; but you can put your question to Mrs. Lemon herself. It is optional with her to go or to remain, so far as I am concerned. I may add this one thing, however,” added Lady Geith, hastily, “that she has as good a right to hear what I am about to say as any person living.”

“In virtue of which right I claim leave to remain where I am,” said Mrs. Lemon, defiantly.

“You have long come between me and my mother, madam,” observed Sir Mark, “and it is, therefore, useless for me to contend against an influence which, at the same time, I confess I am at a loss to understand.”

For a moment Mrs. Lemon seemed as though she were about to answer, and to answer gently; but if she did entertain such a purpose she changed it, and turned with a look of expectation towards Lady Geith, who said, —

“I have come here, Mark, to tell you a secret, which I once thought to have carried to my grave with me. You can ask for what explanation you like afterwards; but the simple fact is this: You are not my son; I am not your mother.”

“Your ladyship must be mad,” exclaimed Mark, as he grasped the mantelpiece for support.

“So I had the privilege of remarking to Lady Geith, before we left Nice, when she told me for what purpose she intended coming to England,” said Mrs. Lemon, from the depths of the arm-chair she occupied.

“Mad!” echoed Lady Geith, mournfully: “yes, Mark, there was a time in my life when I believe I was mad; when that woman, knowing my weak point, put the plan into my mind which has made my whole existence wretched. I was mad when I listened to her, but in my sober senses I have repented night and day ever since.”

“Mother,” — and Sir Mark’s strong voice grew weak and faint. “Mother, say you are jesting; say you are punishing me for my folly, for my extravagance; tell me what

you have said is untrue. For the love of Heaven, mother, anything rather than that I am not your son."

She had never thought of this; never in her own self-pity, in her vain regret, had she imagined how the tale she told would affect Sir Mark. Knowing always his true position, she had forgotten that he had never looked upon himself but as a rightful heir, as a neglected son; and now, when in a moment his ghastly face and expression of sickly horror told her what a fearful piece of intelligence her speech had conveyed to him, her anger died out in a moment, and the keenest remorse sprang to life in its stead.

"Oh, Mark! forgive me, forgive me!" and Lady Geith, in her abject repentance, in her despairing sorrow, flung herself at the feet of the man whom she had enriched for the sole purpose, as it seemed, of one day making him a beggar.

"I do not know what it is I have to forgive," he said, as he lifted her from the floor and placed her in the nearest chair, "for I cannot understand what you mean; I do not comprehend what you have been trying to tell me. If it be true what you say, if I am not your son, whose son am I? Was George your child? Am I his brother? Tell me all about it; only for God's sake do not keep me any longer in suspense."

Thus exhorted, Lady Geith, who had changed in a moment from judge to criminal, told him everything with which the reader is already acquainted; but she studiously avoided making any mention of the one point on which Sir Mark was the most anxious for information. Three or four times he broke across her story to ask her this; and as often as he asked, she continued her narrative without heeding his interruption.

When she had quite finished, Sir Mark said, —

"And now having heard whose son I am not, I demand to be told whose son I am."

There was a long pause, during the continuance of which Sir Mark looked from Lady Geith to Mrs. Lemon, and from Mrs. Lemon back to Lady Geith.

“Whose son am I?” he asked again. “Will neither of you who devised this cursed plot open your lips now, to say where you got me? Will you not, at least, tell me the name of the mother who sold me, and what price you gave her for me?”

“You had better not ask anything further, Mark; you had better rest content.”

“Rest content!” he repeated, scoffingly; “do you think I shall let this matter stop here? Do you imagine for a moment I shall pause now, till I know every in and out of this iniquitous transaction, — till I have cleared myself from all guilty participation in it? I shall go direct to George; I shall tell him every sentence you have told me to-night, and I shall leave you to make what reparation you can in the future for the wrong you have done him in the past.”

Having made which speech, he was turning angrily to leave the room, when Mrs. Lemon seized him, and exclaiming, —

“You will never be so crazy as to go and tell him; you will surely never let what you have heard this night come to his knowledge,” pulled him back into the apartment.

“Mrs. Lemon,” answered Sir Mark, “though you have managed Lady Geith’s affairs, I can assure you that you shall not manage mine;” and he was making another attempt to reach the door when Lady Geith’s companion again desired him to stop.

“I command you, sir, to wait and listen to what I have to say.”

“And by what right, if I may inquire, do you presume to command me?” he asked.

“By the best of all rights,” she answered, “for I am your mother. Oh, Mark!” cried the unhappy woman, “have you never felt that I was your mother? Is there nothing in your heart which tells you I am speaking the truth now?”

She would have come near him, but he waived her off; she would have clung to him, but he threw her hand away from him; she would have pleaded for mercy and forgive-

ness, but Mark turned a deaf ear to her words; he would listen to nothing she had to say; he would put no questions save these: "Who was my father? Whose child was Lettice?" and to both Lady Geith replied, — Lady Geith who could not find it in her heart to tell him everything, — "Your father was Captain Lemon; you and Lettice were brother and sister."

"You and Lettice were not brother and sister," broke out Mrs. Lemon; "your father was not Captain Lemon. As you have said so much, my lady, I will say more; as you have chosen to tell the secret we both swore should never pass our lips, — as, to serve your own purposes, you have thrust my son from the place into which, of your own free will, you put him, — I will tell you something you might have guessed long ago, if you would. You were not," she added, turning to Sir Mark, "the son of myself and Captain Lemon, as Lady Geith believed, but you were the son of Sir Mark Geith, and he knew who was your mother, and aided the deception for his own sake. Now, my lady, that you have ousted my son from his home and his title, which of us has the worst of it, you or I? the wife or the mother, — which?"

But Lady Geith could not answer; she was lying like one dead in Mark's arms; she had risen to reply to the taunt of the woman who had made her life, married and widowed, weariness to her; but before she could open her lips she had fallen forward on Mark's shoulder, with the blood gurgling from her mouth, with her gray hair hanging about her old and haggard face.

That face had been lovely once; that hair had been black as night, glossy as a raven's wing, in the days when she was neglected for the sake, as she knew now, of Mark's mother, — for the love of as mean, as low, and as designing a woman as ever breathed.

All these years she had believed the story which her companion had first told her; had believed the tale of Mrs. Lemon to confiding fondness for her future husband; had

refused to credit the evidence of her own senses, which might have told her Mark's likeness to the late baronet was something more than accidental; and now she lay in the arms of the son of the woman who had deluded her; by them stricken down, by the base treachery, by the abominable ingratitude of the woman in whom she had trusted.

That woman would now have come forward to help her, but Sir Mark put her sternly aside.

"Leave Lady Geith to me," he said; "or, if you would do her a kindness, send my wife here."

"You will not tell her, Mark," implored Mrs. Lemon, — "you will not tell her."

"Send my wife here," repeated the baronet; "send her here at once."

And as he spoke he laid his hand on the bell, and rang it violently for assistance.

"Tell one of the men to saddle a horse, and ride over for the doctor directly. Tell another to be ready to start for the station; I shall want to telegraph to town." And Sir Mark lifted Lady Geith gently, I might almost say lovingly, and carrying her into the next room, laid her on the bed.

All that night Lady Geith lay between life and death. All that night Sir Mark Geith and his wife watched beside her.

Before morning, Cissy knew everything. Knew her husband had no claim either to title or estate. That the man she had loved was the rightful owner of Snareham. Knew her daughters were fortuneless; she and Mark penniless; but still she watched on till morning came, till they began to look for the great London doctor, who said, on his arrival, that Lady Geith required nothing but quietness and nourishment. "With those," finished the medical magnate, "there is nothing to apprehend." Having made which agreeable statement, the autocrat pocketed his fee, and was driven to the station in triumph.

Meanwhile Sir Mark Geith adhered to his first determina-

tion. He would have nothing to do with his mother; he would see George Geith as soon as might be; in accordance with which resolves, he next morning despatched Mrs. Lemon bag and baggage to the Halkin Street mansion, and he himself started by an afternoon train for London.

Arrived there, he took up his quarters at the Guildhall Hotel, in the city, and walked thence to Fen Court, where, late though the hour was, he expected to find his cousin.

He had not heard of his marriage; he was not aware he lived on the premises, but he knew George worked hard, and thought he should see him accordingly.

When he reached Fen Court, all the offices were closed, and, but for a light in the accountant's old office, Mark would have fancied that he was away too. As it was, he rang the bell, and asked the girl who appeared in answer to his summons if he could see Mr. Geith.

"Will you walk in?" said the servant; and she left him standing in the clerk's office, while she ran up-stairs to tell her master.

Directly afterwards George appeared, and took the visitor into his own especial sanctum, where he lit the gas, and pushed a chair for his cousin close beside the fire which blazed cheerily and cosily on the hearth.

"You do not reproach me, then, George," said the baronet, when the other took a seat opposite to him, — "you do not reproach me, then?"

"Reproach you?" answered George, "why should I? It is only natural that I should feel sorry; but Snareham was your own to do what you liked with, and you have done what you liked with it. There is an end of the matter."

"No, George; you mistake. There is not an end of the matter, for Snareham was not mine to do what I liked with, and I have come to tell you this."

"Not yours!" and George looked at his cousin inquiringly. "Not yours; Mark, you are dreaming."

"I wish I was, George. I wish I was. Look here, old

fellow, Snareham belongs to you, what is left of it, and the title is yours, and I am nothing but a beggar, and an intruder, and a swindler."

"What the devil do you mean, man?" asked the accountant. "Hold up your head (which latter appendage Mark was leaning against the chimney-piece), and tell me what has happened in plain English, instead of in riddles, if you can."

Thus entreated, Mark began his story. He told every particular which he knew himself, and he concluded by requesting his cousin to come down to Snareham, and turn him and his out of it. "I will withdraw the advertisements. I will go to the diggings, and resign everything," said Sir Mark, piteously, as though he expected his cousin to handcuff him forthwith and take him off to prison.

For full ten minutes the accountant sat thinking in silence over the singular revelation just made to him; but, at the expiration of that time, he answered, —

"So far as the world is concerned, you can remain what you are to the end of the chapter. To me your title would be useless, or worse than useless. Keep it if you like and welcome."

"You are too generous, George, — too good, too considerate," and the baronet really felt that his cousin was the noblest fellow in creation as he spoke.

"Generous, am I?" repeated the accountant, with a smile, a mournful, despairing smile. "Come up-stairs with me and see if I am not as fortunate as I am generous, — come."

Greatly marvelling, his cousin followed him into his old office, now a sitting-room, where he was duly introduced to Mrs. Geith, who, at her husband's desire, made tea immediately for Sir Mark.

"I had no idea you were married, George," said the baronet, when Beryl left the room for a moment; "your wife is a charming creature; you are, indeed, fortunate."

"I know you will say so when I tell you everything, re-

plied George, dryly, "We have one child, too, — perhaps you would like to see him?"

"But he is asleep, George, — fast asleep," remonstrated Beryl, when her husband presently begged her to bring in the baby; "if I wake him he will cry, and you know how you grumble when he does cry."

Which George did know perfectly well, and so he quietly gave up the point, and contented himself with remarking that Mark could take a look at the new-comer in his cradle.

"What have you called him?" asked Sir Mark.

"Walter Ambrose," answered his cousin, and the pair looked at one another.

"It is many a long day since there was a Walter in the Geith family before," remarked the baronet, significantly.

"And it may be many a long day before there will be a Walter again," thought the accountant, but he held his peace, and travelled back in memory to the night when he had last stood in the picture-gallery at Snareham, looking at the portrait of the Puritan soldier.

"You have seen my wife now, and you have seen my son," said George Geith, as he and his cousin walked along Fenchurch Street to the Guildhall Hotel, "and no doubt you think what you say, that I am a very generous individual for letting you keep what can be of no possible use to myself. Whatever else you may be, Mark, you are still apparently my cousin, and I wonder whether, if I tell you something which is breaking my heart, you will keep my secret for the sake of the days when we were boys together."

"I will keep it, I will be true to you; if only because of the great wrong that I have done to you, I will be faithful to you now."

"Thank you," said George, and he thought for a moment ere he proceeded. "With regard to what you have told me to-night, it is impossible for me to say how I should act were I situated differently. Under no circumstances, however, I



think, should I make any move in the matter ; but as it is, I can do nothing, for this reason. Beryl is not legally my wife, and my child is consequently illegitimate. A fortnight since there was not a happier man in the kingdom than myself ; but I did not know then that a woman was living who has cursed my whole life."

"Tell me, if you can, how it all came about," said Sir Mark, compassionately ; "tell me if you like, if you think it would be any relief to you, if you think I can help you in the matter — can I help you, George?" and the baronet, as we must continue to call him, laid his hand on his cousin's shoulder as he spoke.

"I think so, or I should scarcely have taken you into my confidence," said the accountant. "Years and years ago, Mark, before ever I took orders, before I left college, I met with this woman ; I was young then, and was foolish, and I suppose I thought I was in love with her ; of one thing, however, I am confident, which is, that I never intended to marry her ; more shame for me, perhaps, but it is the truth. However, to make an end of this part of the mystery, I did marry her, and when I could afford to take her to a home of my own I meant to do so. Though it was not long before I found out what a bad bargain I had made of it, though she was my inferior in every respect, and older than I in addition, still I fully intended doing my duty by her. Mark, you will try and believe that?"

"I do believe every word you have told me," said the other earnestly, "and I believe more, — I think you were duped somehow, and that you were taken in by some low, designing woman."

"That is true enough," answered George, "but hear me further. We had not been married a fortnight before I found she was false to me, before I discovered that a fellow whom I had believed to be my friend, and who had urged and egged me on to marry her, should have been her husband instead of me. If I had caught him then, I would

have killed him ; if the pair had not disappeared together, I would have had the life of one, if not both, though I had swung for it. As I said, however, they disappeared, and I fell back into my old life, hoping I should never hear more of either. In due time I took orders ; I went to Morelands. I had been wild, but I steadied down and began to see that a character for respectability would be of value to me in my way through the world. I meant to see her, to get rid some day of the ties that bound me. I did not greatly like a curate's life, but still being a curate, with the Great Snareham tithes in prospective, did not seem a bad provision for an almost penniless man. I had nearly forgotten my boyish misadventure, as nearly as a man can ever forget anything of the kind, when suddenly she reappeared. She came to me drunk ; she came into my sitting-room, accompanied by her father, who was, if possible, still more tipsy than herself, and insisted that I should receive her as my wife, that I should introduce her to my friends."

Not all the years which had come and gone since then had been able to efface from George Geith's mind the shame and horror of that night ; and he paused for a moment ere he proceeded, as though striving to recover his composure before he went on with his story.

"It was money they wanted, Mark — money, of course, and nothing else ; and before I could get rid of them they had swept away almost every sixpence of the sum I had put aside so hardly and at such a sacrifice to effect at some future day my complete emancipation.

"What was I to do ? I put it to you, Mark, what could I do but what I did do, namely, leave Morelands, and relinquish the Church, and come to London to seek my fortune."

"You might have come to us," said the baronet, reproachfully ; "we could surely have helped you, and we would."

"All that time," answered his cousin, "I considered my promise to my mother bound me completely. At that time,

so," he added, "I would have done anything rather than confessed my folly. When men are young, Mark, they think it looks more manly for them to be villains than dupes. I would have been the former had I not been the latter. Being the latter, the shame and the fear of ridicule completely overmastered me. If I had to do the same thing again I am still not sure that I could stay to face the consequences of my own acts."

Walking leisurely, the pair had by this time reached Northbury, and as George finished speaking, they crossed Longgate Street, and were proceeding along Gresham Street, when a cab-horse turning out of the Old Jewry, and driven rapidly round the corner of Coleman Street, came sharp against a woman who was at the moment stepping off the curbstone.

With a scream she went down in the road, and spite of the driver's efforts to pull up, the mare would have been over her but for Mark, who, far more quickly than I can write it, dragged her from under the horse's feet, and pulled her to the side path.

"Turn your cab round, and take her to the nearest hospital," said Sir Mark, who saw at a glance that the woman was hurt, and that she belonged to the class called "unfortunate."

"I'll be damned if I will," answered the man, gathering up his reins; "it was her own fault."

"I'll be damned if you won't," retorted Sir Mark, and holding the injured woman on one arm, he laid his other hand on the horse.

"Take her from me, George," he shouted, "while I stop this blackguard."

"What is it, sir,— what is the matter?" and two or three of the city police, stout, burly fellows, hearing the noise, came to the baronet's assistance.

"The matter!" said Sir Mark; "that this scoundrel having done his best to drive over a woman, has almost cut

my head off with his whip, because I would not let him go on. And he has cut my cheek, too, I think," added the baronet. "Hang it, George, I thought you had more pluck than to stand by and see me paid out like that, without stretching a finger to save me. Why, where the devil has he got to?" and Sir Mark looked round for his cousin in amazement.

Crouched up in a doorway close at hand he found him,— crouched on the step, shivering like some one in an ague fit.

"Why did you not let her alone?" he said, as Mark raised him to his feet, and pulled him along the pavement towards his hotel; "half a second more would have done it. I shall never forgive you for touching her — never."

"You do not mean, George, that woman was — your — wife?"

"She was. I saw her face by the gas-light, as she stepped into the road, and when the horse knocked her down, I prayed she might be killed."

"Then I was not mistaken, and you did try to pull me back," said Sir Mark, loosening, as he spoke, his hold on the accountant's collar. "You may thank God I was the strongest, or you would have been her murderer."

"You may depend on one thing, which is, that I shall not thank you for saving her," answered George Geith, as he broke away from his cousin, and rushed, not knowing and not caring where he went, up Basinghall Street, and through Aldermanbury Postern, northward.

For a time Mark followed him, but not knowing much of the city, and not particularly liking the look of the locality in which he speedily found himself, he turned back to Fen Court, and walked up and down beneath the archway, within sight of the graves, within sound of the trees, waiting and watching for George's return.

Never a lonelier vigil had the baronet kept. Where was the man?

By the light in Beryl's sitting-room, Mark knew he had

ot returned. Where could he be? Had he met with any accident? would he end his misery by a leap from one of the bridges? what had become of him? and as the neighbouring churches chimed out the hours, Mark's uneasiness increased, till his anxiety became almost unendurable.

"You are waiting for Mr. Geith, I think you said, sir," length remarked the policeman on duty. "I believe that him coming now, though it is not much like his usual ep."

Nor was it; feebly and uncertainly George Geith came along the street, with the mental fever past; with the demon that had taken possession of him exorcised, he walked with weak and faltering steps towards his home.

"I have been waiting for you so long!" exclaimed Mark, eagerly. "If anything had happened to you to-night, I could never have forgiven myself for parting with you in anger. Where have you been?"

"I do not know," answered the accountant, and he retched out his hand and held on by the railings; "I have been walking till I am worn out, I think," standing ever within sight of the window; "still I can truthfully excuse me of one thing, Mark,—that I am not sorry now you saved me. I thank God you were the strongest, and I will try to do my duty, His will be done."

## CHAPTER XLV.

## THE OLD SKELETON.

In the life-stream of every man there comes a point where the waters flow more rapidly onward, where many currents meeting produce not merely eddies and swells, and turbulence and disorder, but also widen and deepen the river of existence, and cause it to proceed on its course to the great sea, with increased swiftness, with a fiercer rush.

At such a point George Geith has now arrived, and the din of many rushing waters, of many coming events, confused and deafened him.

Mechanically he went about his daily work, — about the work that had so lately been to him the sole employment of his life; but his heart and his mind were not in his office. They were at Snareham, in Bartholomew's Hospital, at the Guildhall Hotel, with the Hon. and Rev. Mr. Clayfield, and in the future, the dark and uncertain future, towards which he looked with horror and affright.

For the second time George Geith was afraid to face his sorrows boldly. As at Morelands he had fled from the wretched creature with whom he had linked his lot, so in Fen Court, he lacked courage to pursue the only course which presented even the faintest promise of peace to him and his. All in vain Sir Mark implored and Mr. Tettin counselled; all in vain Mr. Clayfield offered his aid, and promised that the, by no means despicable, influence of his own family should be exerted to assist in ridding the unhappy man of the chains he had riveted on himself; nothing could move him.

“ He could do anything but break Beryl’s heart,” he said. “ He could pay any money ; undergo any suffering ; consent to any sacrifice, rather than let Beryl know she was not legally his wife, — that the child she had borne him was illegitimate.”

He had been strong to work, he had been strong to endure ; he had been as iron in times of difficulty, as steel when he met with reverses. But this grief crushed him, and he let himself drift away with the currents, which he thought were too powerful for him to struggle against ; until, alas ! the time for struggle was past forever.

And, indeed, those who urged him the most earnestly to tell Beryl everything, who knew that a full and perfect confidence now was his only chance of ultimate salvation, could not but acknowledge his position to be one full of difficulty ; could not say for certain that, had they stood in his place, they would have evinced greater courage than he.

No circumstance of humiliation seemed wanting in the whole affair. To have been entrapped into a marriage with such a woman ; to have fled from her, and paid her for silence, and worked to insure her silence through years, rather than confess his folly, was bad enough ; but to have been duped by her a second time ; to have married on the faith of forged letters ; to have been gulled in manhood more stupidly even than he had been gulled in youth ; to have eluded his wife’s search so successfully that he had driven her, or had apparently driven her, to gain her living among the outcasts of society, there was surely enough here to try the courage of the bravest, to conquer the spirit of the firmest man living.

Thinking of Beryl’s loving faith — of her innocence, her purity, her spotlessness — thinking of the stain he, who would have laid down his life for her, had put on her fair name — thinking of the one woman who was really his wife, of the other woman from whom anybody might now

separate him, George Geith turned coward, and refused to battle with his misery.

He would die sooner than let Beryl know on what a poor broken reed she had leaned, when she elected to trust her happiness into his keeping. He would do anything rather than drag his poor darling's name through the mire with which his wife had bedaubed herself and her husband. He could not, he would not, run the risk of having to separate himself from Beryl. He would not have her even mentioned in the divorce courts. He would not have even the faintest breath of gossip pass over her fair fame. He would give money; he would work; he would wait; he would keep his skeleton concealed at all hazards, at any price.

In a strait like this, what was man to say to man? What could even the best and kindest do, save leave him alone with his misery in the hands of God? Advice was but torture; worldly counsel but mockery; whilst his friends, if they attempted to take higher ground, if they began inquiry on the broader principles of right and wrong, the weary sufferer grew impatient, and told them what they knew to be true, that there are cases in which no mortal being can decide what is right and what is wrong, and that his was one of these.

"Help me to compromise it," he said; "help me to get her out of the country, or show me how I can leave England and take Beryl with me, and I will thank you with all my soul. As for the sin, if it be a sin, I will settle that with my Maker when He calls me to account. He knows my extremity, and will have mercy accordingly."

If this view of the matter were not orthodox, it was at any rate natural; it was so natural, indeed, that Mr. Clayfield stopped Mr. Tettin in the commencement of an excellent sermon, and said very earnestly, —

"We will leave you then in His hands, for we are not your judges. He can make darkness light, and a crooked path straight. He can turn sorrow into joy, and bring forth



good out of evil, my poor friend," and the clergyman laid his hand kindly on George's shoulder. "I pray that in His infinite mercy He may do all this for you, and that He may open a way for you out of your present trouble, a way which we in our blindness cannot discern."

It was well to be tender and pitiful; it was best if any error were made it was made on the side of Christian charity, of brotherly love; for everything was so dark to George Geith in those days of doubt and suffering that he needed the gentlest handling, the most forbearing consideration.

As for Mark, he was willing to do whatever his cousin asked him. He went to the hospital and saw the wicked Jezebel who had cursed George's life; saw her with the paint washed off her dissipated face; with every wrinkle visible; with every line which passion and vice and ill-temper had traced on her countenance distinctly visible.

A clever woman, a vindictive woman, a dangerous woman; a woman who had certainly been once beautiful and attractive, but who was now neither beautiful nor attractive.

Looking at her, talking to her, Mark's heart bled for his cousin, and remembering how but for the shameful imposition which had given him his title and his fortune, George might have freed himself from this yoke years and years before, Mark grew desperate, and could have cursed the woman whose life he had saved apparently only that she might raise herself on her elbow and tell him, with a very devil in her eyes, that she would never rest day nor night till she had revenged herself on her husband, and compelled him to acknowledge her in the sight of men.

"But you do not know where to find him," said Mark boldly.

"That has been my difficulty," she answered.

"And supposing you did find him, you could not compel him to receive you, nor to support you. You might compel him to seek for a divorce; indeed, I know that is what he will do if you force him to extremities."

She lay there listening to him, weighing every word, thinking over the meaning of every sentence.

Far too deep a player to show him her hand, she watched each card as he threw it down, hoping to find out the weak point in his game.

Deep as she was, however, for once she had met with her match. Mark was on the look-out too. He was striving to discover whether she really did possess any claim on George at all, whether she might not have been a married woman at the time she deluded him. He had heard of such things, he had read of them, and his determination to get as much information as he could out of her, made it extremely difficult for her to extract any information from him.

It was for the credit of the family he, Sir Mark, wanted the unfortunate affair hushed up; for the sake of his mother he desired to effect some compromise, lest the knowledge of so unfortunate a connection should cause annoyance.

If she were regarding George as a prospectively rich man, and desired to retain a claim on him in consequence, he, Sir Mark, assured her she was reckoning without her host. He, the person now addressing her, had cut the entail off Snareham before his marriage. Snareham was in the market; whatever might be left of the purchase-money after it was sold belonged to him, Mark, exclusively, and was in his power to will to his wife and daughters. George was not a wealthy man, was never likely to become a wealthy man, and if she, Mrs. Geith, wanted money, she would have to look to the Geith family, and not to her husband for it.

To all this Mrs. Geith listened attentively; the greatest part of it was news to her, and had she not believed that behind Mark's statement there lay some strong motive for desiring her silence, she would have come into his terms at once.

As it was she hesitated; "she would take money, she said, but not be bound to leave the country."

"If you will not leave the country," answered Sir Mark, "our negotiation is at an end," and he rose to go.

"I will think over it. I will write to you ; I will see you when I am able to leave this place."

"Very well," agreed Sir Mark ; "meantime I will leave you money, so that you may live respectably till you have made up your mind."

And having, as he considered, put matters in train so far, Sir Mark left her and went to report progress to his cousin.

"I mean to employ a detective," said the baronet, "and obtain every possible particular about her former life."

"You can do so if you like," replied George, wearily, "but I am sure it is merely throwing money away."

"Still it would be a satisfaction," persisted Sir Mark ; and he employed a detective accordingly.

Meantime Mrs. George Geith had not been idle either ; she had put her detectives on the scent, and they had discovered for her that George was married ; that he lived with his wife in Fen Court, where Sir Mark visited him.

"So!" exclaimed George's skeleton, and the first place she went to when she was discharged from hospital was to her husband's office.

That interview sealed George's fate. She found out his weak point ; she played upon his fears ; she tortured him ; she taunted him ; she got money from him ; she laid him down in his misery and trampled over him ; she had the best of it. From that day out he was slave, she mistress.

With the treachery of a very Judas she induced him to believe money could keep her quiet. With a refinement of cruelty she made him work for her, toil for her, borrow for her, buy for her. She took handsome apartments, she fed sumptuously every day, she clothed herself in purple and fine linen, and then drove in her carriage to the city, and took money from this poor, proud man, whose one weak point, his love for Beryl, was a tower of strength to her.

To all things, however, there comes an end, and accordingly there came a day to George Geith, when, seeing all his aunt's money and all he could make in business, would

not satisfy the daughter of the horse-leech, he told her they must come to some understanding, that she must fix some price and keep to it.

Handsome apartments, fine equipage, purple, and fine linen, living sumptuously every day, had been things greatly to the liking of Mrs. George Geith; but when she found that there was to be an end to all of them, when she discovered that a small certain income was meant to take the place of a banker who honored her checks *ad. lib.*, the wretched woman reverted to her own original plan, and resolved, now she had got all the money she could, to take what she called her "revenge."

For which purpose, watching her opportunity, she called on Beryl, and told her all — told her she was no wife; that her child was no better than the brat left at the doorstep of some wealthy man by the poorest and lowest castaway.

"He has refused to buy my silence longer," she said, transgressing in her passion all bounds of prudence; "and he fancies that I will sit down tamely and see another woman usurp my place. He thought I would hold my tongue, that you would never know, that you would never prosecute him for bigamy."

In a moment Beryl saw her advantage. Like a tiger rushing to protect her young, so she sprang forward to protect her husband.

"Prosecute him for bigamy!" she repeated; "who is to do that?"

"Why, you or your friends, to be sure," retorted Mr. George Geith's first choice.

"A man cannot be prosecuted for bigamy unless he have married two wives," said Beryl, turning her face, flushed with sudden determination, towards her enemy.

"No, but he has married two wives," answered Mrs. George Geith, triumphantly.

"How do you know that?" and Beryl looked straight at the woman she questioned.

“How do I know that?” repeated Mrs. George Geith; “because he has.”

“How do you know he has?” said Beryl, pushing her advantage.

Oh, these women! what will they not do, what will they not think of, when the happiness of the man they love is at stake? Had it come new to her, Beryl might have hesitated; had she not been prepared, she might have faltered; but warned by that letter, she had been strengthened; a watchful observer during the last few months, she had suspected, and now she turned her strength and her suspicion into weapons for her husband's defence.

She would not acknowledge she was married to him; not all her visitor's artifices should wring that from her.

And thus when the other tried to shame her into a confession, when she inquired how she could live with him, knowing she was not his wife, Beryl, with the blood seemingly standing still about her heart, answered, —

“What is that to you? for that which I have done, for that which I shall do, I am not answerable to any mortal upon earth.”

“If it be true what you say,” answered the lawful wife, — “if you are really not married to him, he has then been more careful for you than you are for yourself.”

“He need not have been,” Beryl replied; “there is nobody now living whose heart it could break, to know that I am living with George Geith without being his wife.”

“I cannot believe it,” said the other. “I do not credit what you tell me; you are doing this to screen him. He would never have been thoughtful and careful for you, if he had not deceived you first.”

“Do I look like a woman who has been deceived?” and Beryl rose and fronted her enemy; “do I look like a betrayed and injured wife? Did I receive your news as news? Was I hurt? Was I astonished? What have I said or done to make you think I am anything else than what I tell you,

a woman who, having loved George Geith better than anything else on earth — better than you, though you are his wife, ever loved him — means to stay with him to the end?"

Beryl's visitor looked round the room; she glanced out at the churchyard, she took an inventory of the furniture, she appraised the value of Beryl's dress, she scrutinized every feature in her face, before she said slowly, and not without a certain reluctant admiration, —

"I believe you have loved him. I believe you do. If it were otherwise, you could not sacrifice yourself for his sake as you are doing now."

"I am not sacrificing myself," Beryl persisted. "It is George who has sacrificed himself for me."

"Till very lately he believed me dead," said Mrs. George Geith.

"What of that," retorted Beryl; "it is not necessary for a man to marry another wife, because he thinks his first one dead. Do you not think it the most natural thing in the world for a man to consider he had had enough of matrimony when he tried it with you? If you do not, I do;" and Beryl, growing desperate in her efforts at persuasion, became personal, not to say insulting, in her remarks.

All the less for that, perhaps, did Mrs. Geith believe her; but certainly Beryl's statement, whether that statement were true or false, placed her in a dilemma. If George and Beryl were not man and wife, then the last shot which she had held back for her direst extremity would turn out to be but blank cartridge; and even if they had been married, and that this girl, this woman, this wife, whatever she might be called, refused to prosecute? Truly Mrs. George Geith began to think her husband had proved almost too easy a prey; that he must have been a desperately timid pigeon to submit to her plucking without making even an effort to fly away.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

## TWO MOST WRETCHED.

MANY an one who can bear up bravely enough during the wildest storm, who can face the rain and the wind, will yet break down after the tempest has passed ; but such was not the case with Beryl. For so long a time she had felt the clouds gathering ; for so long she had noticed the alteration in her husband ; for so long she had known of the visits of some strange woman to him ; for so long a time she had been coming slowly, gradually to believe in the existence of some secret, which secret she connected, — by the same feminine instinct which draws oftentimes more certain and rapid conclusions than can be adduced from facts by any powers of reasoning, — with the letter that had brought such misery to her ; for so long she had been waiting, watching, listening, for what I think Gerald Griffin calls the footfall of fate, that the appearance of Mrs. George Geith proved rather a confirmation of her fears than a surprise to the poor devoted wife, who resolved on the instant to save George at any sacrifice to herself.

What were her fears, her happiness, her future, truth itself even, in comparison to the love she bore him ? If she had been angry with him once when the wrong seemed to lie between him and herself, was not that all the more reason why she should defend him now, when enemies came up armed against him ? Every thought for herself, every feeling of resentment was absorbed in pity for the man, the wretched man, who was struggling to keep her fee and his at

bay. She could understand now why he had never mentioned his first marriage to her ; she comprehended why he had not slept well lately, why his appetite failed, why his spirits were low, why he had evinced towards her such a passionate tenderness ; why he had been at once so irritable and so loving, so exacting and so remorseful.

Did Beryl weep, it was for him ; did she devise schemes of release, they were all for his relief and benefit ; did she lie, did the heart which was truth itself frame falsehoods, did the trembling lips utter deceit, it was for him, — all, all for him.

Her religion was to love this man whom she had chosen ; against whom she had never felt anger and resentment but once ; with her whole soul and spirit to fight for him, protect him, cling to him through joy and through sorrow, in life and in death.

All the judges in the land could not have persuaded Beryl she was not his wife ; all the clergymen in the kingdom, all the bishops and archbishops with the head of the Church to boot, could not have made her believe she was sinful, because her thought of leaving him never crossed her mind.

The greater his distress the closer it behooved her to cling to him, and she would love him and cling to him all the more, because this woman had risen up to try and part them.

And thus it came to pass that when George was in his direst extremity ; when he was wondering how he should ever be able to satisfy the demands his first wife was making upon him ; when, one day, ill and weary, he paused for a moment to think what he had best do before going down to see —

“ That lady, in the office, sir.” Beryl came suddenly to the rescue.

Without a tear, without a faltering tone, she said, —

“ Let me go to her, George. I have seen her ; I know all. We will let her do her worst ; only you shall not give



her any more money ; you shall not, I say ; she has harassed you long enough."

"Let you go to her !" he repeated. "Do you know what you are talking about ? Have you any idea of whom it is you are speaking ?"

"I am speaking of the woman you thought dead, George. I am talking of your wife."

And before he could prevent her she slipped out of his grasp, and ran down the stairs and entered his office, and confronted her enemy.

She bolted the door inside so that he should not follow her, and then she stood looking at Mrs. Geith, and demanding what she wanted.

"I want my husband."

"He is ill ; you cannot see him ; you shall not come here to harass him," and Beryl stood with both hands clasping the back of the chair while she panted out the words. "You cannot frighten me," she went on, "and, for the future, you will not frighten him. He knows now that I know, and I would die before I would harm him myself or let you harm him either."

"If he had not married you, why should he care about your knowing ?" asked Mrs. Geith.

"What has that to do with you ?" answered Beryl, resorting to her former line of defence ; "how often am I to tell you that what I choose to do, or what I choose to leave undone, is no concern of yours ?"

"He married you." To that text Mrs. Geith stood resolutely.

"He did not !" and in the back-office, whence he had sent his clerk out on an impromptu errand, George Geith heard every word she uttered.

"But I say he did."

"And I say he did not."

"It is of no earthly use your holding out in that way about the matter, because when you are summoned as a

witness, you will have to speak the truth," said Mrs. Geith, with rising anger.

"If you summoned me fifty times I should not appear; and if I did appear, I should only repeat what I have told you," retorted Beryl.

For a moment the two women stood looking at one another; then Mrs. Geith, subduing her anger, said hypocritically, —

"Have you no friends, my poor child, who will interfere to protect you? no father's house to which you can go? no brother to right your wrongs?"

"Wrongs!" repeated Beryl; "what wrongs? Are you trying to get me over to your side? Do you think for a moment I will turn against him? If you are, if you do, you are wasting your time. It is useless trying to tempt me; you might as well attempt to make me forsake my child."

"Then I will expose you; the world shall know you for what you are; it shall know that, for all your soft voice and innocent face, you" —

She knew he was in the other office; she had heard him trying to force the lock, and before her enemy could finish her cruel sentence, could speak the words that Beryl felt were coming, she sprang to the door of communication between the two offices, and crying, "George, stop her. George, you will not desert me," sought refuge at his side.

Then over the pair the long pent-up storm burst forth; a storm that brought the clerks from their desks, the porters from the basements, the servants from up-stairs, that revealed to every man and woman and child who chose to come and listen, what was the skeleton that had cursed George Geith's life, — what the haunting demon that had dogged his footsteps.

It was over; the shock, the expense, the shame, the disgrace. There was no more money to be paid for silence; no more dread of Beryl learning the worst. He could not

stand between her and this trouble longer; his arm was useless to defend, his strength powerless to protect.

It was a secret no longer, — a secret no more between him and her and a few tried friends.

Every chattering errand-boy in the Court knew now that Mr. Geith had "deserted" one wife and married another; his clerks understood what that richly-dressed woman had wanted when she flounced up the staircase, and instructed Mr. Geith's most confidential clerk to tell his employer he was wanted. With that shrinking from having his affairs talked over by the world, which had always been a characteristic of the accountant, he imagined in a moment how the thing would fly; how the boys, meeting their companions in the street, would tell them about the "jolly row" there had just been in Fen Court. He could see them, parcel in hand, basket on head, shouting to each other across Lime Street and Cullum Street; he followed the clerks home, and heard them rehearse the scene to their mothers and sisters; he mentally listened to the servants talking the matter over with the neighboring housekeepers, and beheld nurse weeping as she spoke of that "blessed child which misses always said might some day be a barrow-knight."

Prophetically, George Geith saw and heard all this as he lifted Beryl and carried her up-stairs, out of the reach of the angry woman, away from the eager group of listeners below.

He did not try to stop his wife, but let her say what she would; he let her lie, he let her call him what she would; he let her shout out the whole story of his folly, his misery, his cowardice, for the parish to hear if it liked to; never opened his lips to answer her, and when she began to speak about Beryl, he only took his darling to his heart, and bore the poor, terrified child away.

She had been brave once, but she was brave no longer.

"What can she do, George? what can she do?" was all Beryl could moan out, as she lay on the sofa, watching her husband, who was sitting with his elbows on the table, and his hands covering his face.

He was too sick to speak ; it seemed as though he had lost the power to answer ; and when at last his silence grew unendurable, Beryl staggered to her feet, and put her arms feebly and imploringly round his neck, crying out, "What can she do, George ? what can she do ?"

"I do not know," he answered.

"What are you thinking about, then ? what are you afraid of ?" she asked, a terrible dread, a worse horror causing her breath to come quick and short.

"I am thinking we must part, my darling," and George holding her to his heart, rained tears over her, — tears that had they been of blood, could not have left his heart colder, nor his face paler.

"Part, George ! why should we part ?"

"You heard what she said ; you know what the world will say we are to one another now ;" and the man's voice was hoarse with his passionate weeping, broken by the sobs that he could not restrain. "Oh, Beryl ! my love, my treasure ! how I have striven to keep this sorrow from you ! how little I thought I was taking you to myself for this — for this" —

She did not answer him ; she slid out of his arms to the floor, and lay there with her loosened hair falling over the carpet, where it caught the golden sunbeams as they fell.

Without everything was so bright, within everything was so gloomy ; the leaves were on the trees ; the sun was shining high and clear over London ; the dusty, dingy, town-sparrows were chirping and twittering in the branches and upon the tops of the neighboring houses. The pavement in Billiter Square looked clean and white ; the summer glory was at its zenith, and it had come but to bring this wretchedness to the two, who had enjoyed the full happiness of so many a summer's day together.

How was it that looking at her, as she lay there in her misery, refusing help, refusing comfort, another picture rose up like a reality before George Geith, and compelled his attention.

He had crossed the fields to Withefell ; he stood at the stile once more ; he saw the grassy glade ; the arching trees ; the sunbeams coming and going, flickering and dancing, now hiding, now sinking among the leaves ; a young girl with her dogs ; a happy, smiling, blushing, innocent, pretty face turned towards him ; brown eyes lifted fearlessly to his.

Through his tears the man saw this ; he saw the summer through a mist of grief ; he had met her there, and he had brought her here ; he had found her frank and fearless, trusting and guileless ; and behold ! she was now lying before him, with her heart broken, with her happiness destroyed, humbled to the dust.

But still resolved not to leave him. When she spoke, when she could speak, rather, the first words she uttered were, " George, if you do love me, you cannot go away and leave me. Unless you put me from you, I will never leave you."

He tried to raise her, but she would not let him ; he attempted to soothe her, but she would not listen. With hands clasping his feet, with her head still lying on the floor, she prayed him not to forsake her, not to ask her to go.

" What was the world to her ?" she asked. " What was any one in the world but George ? whom had she ever loved but him ? what had she ever done that she should be cast off now ? She was his wife, — his in her own eyes."

" And I know God thinks I am your wife, too, George," finished Beryl ; if I am not your wife, nobody ever was or will be ; and I cannot part from you now, and I will not, though you bid me go fifty times a day."

He could not do it ; whatever might be the right or whatever might be wrong, he could not listen to such pleadings, and repeat that they must separate. He could not see her dear head laid so low, and find courage to confirm his sentence.

She was more than wife to him : she was his life, his love, his all ; and, as she wished to stay with him, why, they would

pass the future together, let the future bring with it what it liked.

True, George felt what he knew he should never be able to make Beryl understand, viz., that each day as it came would increase the difficulty of their position.

Man and wife they might call themselves, — man and wife, in the sight of God, they had surely been : the question was, not what they thought, not what they had been, but what they were now, what they would be in the future.

Still, though he was conscious of this, George Geith could urge Beryl no further. He had found it hard enough to contend against his own love, against his own desperate longing ; but to leave her to battle also against her misery, to have to unclasp the dear arms from around his neck, to have to put her, spite of her prayers and tears and supplications, away from his heart and his home, George could not do it, let the end prove what it might.

But it was useless for them to attempt to remain in Fen Court, if they were to live together. Beryl, at any rate, must remove to some other part of London, where the story had not travelled, where she would not be met with prying looks and pitying glances whenever she crossed the doorstep.

First, he took lodgings for her, and his doing so seemed to put her true position before Beryl's wondering eyes. He explained to her why she could not remain in Fen Court ; why she must not retain the servants who had lived with them there ; why they must remove to apartments till they could meet with a desirable house ; and Beryl, listening, knew that this could not last forever ; that, let her cling as close as she liked to him, let her hands clasp his as tightly as they would, there must yet come, some day or other, a huge wave to separate them.

She could not have been made to comprehend this by any process of reasoning, but events often prove stronger arguments than words ; and though Beryl held on to her spar all the more desperately as she felt the waters roaring around

her, she still knew — the poor, loving, devoted wife dreaded — that the day of their parting would arrive ere long.

To one lodging after another the news of their invalid marriage followed them. There seemed no use in moving, in changing servants, and yet still they had to move; and Beryl never was allowed by George to keep the same nurse for two weeks together.

“We will get a house of some kind, even though it be not all we wish, and put an end to this,” said George, at last; and before the week was out he had found a home for her, in a lovely, romantic, out-of-the-way spot, not far from Snaresbrook, and on the very edge of Epping Forest.

“My darling will have peace here,” thought the unhappy man, as he walked through the woods when the autumn leaves were falling, and stopped to look down the long glades, where the acorns and the beech-nuts were lying on the close green sward, — “My darling will have peace here,” and for a moment he forgot the sorrow that had come to them, and dreamt of a happiness which was never to be theirs more.”

Meantime, nothing had been heard of Mrs. Geith. From the day when she had brought such misery with her to Fen Court, George had not seen nor received any communication from her. He had written, stating his willingness to allow her a fixed yearly income; but that letter was returned to him through the medium of the Dead Letter Office, with “Gone away; left no address,” scrawled on the envelope.

Where she had gone, what she was doing, no one could form an idea, until Mark heard from his favorite detective, that some person was endeavoring to ascertain what Beryl's maiden name had been.

“He has tried the clerks, the neighbors' housekeepers, the servants that lived with Mr. Geith in Fen Court,” proceeded Sir Mark's informant, “and the next thing I expect to see is, ‘To Parish Clerks and others’ in the *Times*.”

“What is her object?” asked the baronet.

"I should say she wants to know for certain whether Mr. Geith did marry a second time, Sir Mark; that is what nobody now seems to be sure about. The lady having no friends come to see her, makes people almost think they never were married; but then she was so taken aback about the first wife appearing, and she was so altogether unlike a person that would knowingly do anything not regular, that it is hard to get at the truth one way or other."

"But of course, you know, they were married," said Sir Mark.

"Certainly, sir; you have told me so," and the man coughed behind his hand.

"Do you mean to imply that you have any doubts, that you think that I have been deceived myself, or that I have been trying to deceive you?" exclaimed Sir Mark, angrily.

"Nothing of the kind, sir," answered the other, apologetically; "but in course, sir, you are aware *they are living together still.*"

The conclusion which the world would draw from this was inevitable. Sir Mark saw that ruin would ensue to both if they did not separate, and he at once decided to speak, not to his cousin but to Beryl. She should have a home with Lady Geith, with him and his wife; she should have every help and countenance George's family could give her, but she must leave her husband, and that forthwith.

Thinking this over in his mind, Sir Mark looked suddenly up, and seeing in the detective's face an expression which implied a great deal more than the man would have cared to convey in words, he said, —

"You do not believe they were married, and as I feel it is better for my cousin to face anything rather than let his — his second wife suffer under such an imputation, I will tell you where you can see the entry of the marriage for yourself. Having every reason to believe his first wife dead, he married Miss Molozane, as you will find if you like to walk up



to St. Matthew's, in Petersburg Place, and look over the books for the year 1852."

Having vouchsafed which piece of information, Sir Mark Geith put on his hat, and went off to consult Mr. Tettin.

"What do you suppose she can be doing now?" asked the baronet.

"She is going to try to get the second wife's friends to prosecute him for bigamy. She cannot do it herself you know, and as — the — the other will not do it, why, she finds herself rather in a difficulty."

"It would be altogether the best thing, perhaps, that could happen to George," remarked the baronet; but Mr. Tettin shrugged his shoulders.

"It is a thousand pities he did not separate from his second wife at once," he said. "Of course, if he can satisfy a jury that those letters were written by his first wife, that, in fact, he had no share in the forgery, nothing can be done to him."

"Good heavens, Mr. Tettin! surely you are not turning against him now!" exclaimed the baronet.

"No; I have no doubt in the matter; I believe him to have been as firmly persuaded of her death as I was myself; but living on with the second wife is awkward, Sir Mark — awkward, very."

Sir Mark thought it was awkward too, and drove immediately out to Snaresbrook, where he found Beryl, looking pale and thin and anxious.

She heard all he had to say; she agreed in the justice of his remarks; she replied that she would speak to George that very evening; that she had long felt it must come some day, and that it had come; that was all.

Then, when Mark thought how quietly she was taking it, what a pity it was he had never found courage to mention the subject to her before, she broke down, and wept as the baronet had never seen any person weep before. She cried as a woman never cries till her heart is broken; till all hope

is gone; till she has lost everything which makes life worth living for; and Mark knew no more how to comfort her, what to say to her, than if he had been born an idiot.

Until at last a bright idea struck him, and when it struck him, he began, —

“Beryl, do stop; do, like a dear, good girl. If you and George will consent to part for a time, we will get him rid of that woman by some means, and you and he shall be married again, and live happily ever after.”

“What do you mean?” she asked; “how can he get rid of her unless she dies? and I am just as likely to die as she. Look at me, Mark; should you think it probable I should outlive her?”

“I was not talking about her dying,” and Sir Mark took the white, thin hands she stretched out in his, and held them while he spoke; “and I was not thinking of killing her either; but George might get a divorce; it costs ever so much money, but that is a matter of no consequence; and then, Beryl — then you can be married to him once more.”

“Could he get a divorce? could I marry him again?” and Beryl looked into Mark’s face, as if she would read every thought of his soul.

“To be sure you could,” he answered, gayly; “the only pity is, that George did not tell us how he was situated, and we would have found him the money, years before he ever met you, Beryl. But for mercy’s sake,” added the baronet, “do not begin to cry again, only hope for the best, and do as I advise you, and everything will come right in the end.”

She had not the remotest intention of crying, but she did what astonished Mark much more, she pulled her hands out of his, and threw her arms round his neck, and kissed and blessed him.

“He had spoken the first words of comfort she had heard since — since she knew she was not George’s wife,” she said, and the sunshiny look of former days came back for a moment into her eyes, and she wiped away her tears, and

avowed her intention of doing whatever Sir Mark told her; "no matter how hard it may be," finished the poor child, "I will do it; I promise you I will."

Long and earnest was the talk they had over George's future prospects, and the result of the latter portion of it was that Sir Mark took Beryl back to town with him, at her own desire.

She wanted to see Mr. Foss and Mr. Bemmidge, and to beg them not to answer any inquiries, should inquiries be made.

They were only too glad to be of use to her in any way; but Mr. Foss suggested that she had better proceed to Holloway, and see Gertrude, "because," said he, "there has been a lady here within the last two hours asking for Mrs. Foss's address. I was out at the time, and when the clerk told me, it never struck me who it could be till now."

Had the choice been offered to her, Beryl would rather have gone to visit a wild Indian than Mrs. Foss, *née* Gilling; but Sir Mark advised her so strongly to lose no time about the matter that she drove direct to Lilac Lodge, which was the name, at once rural and alliterative, of the rest Mr. Foss had provided for his lady-love.

Virtuously indignant was Mrs. Foss at the idea of Beryl presuming to call upon her. She spoke of her visit, subsequently, to her friends, as an "insolent intrusion"; and it is very probable that had the sight of Sir Mark's carriage not toned down the lady's displeasure, she might have been insolent also.

As it was, Mrs. Foss was simply swelling and matronly and detestable. She was not on the whole sorry in her heart, perhaps, that Beryl had called; she thought Beryl would be envious of her new furniture, covered with antimacassars; her carpets; her bright steel grates; her chimney glass; her chimney ornaments; as if God helps the shallow, heartless simpleton. Beryl saw none of these things, or would have cared if the curtains had been made of bullion, or the floor covered with bank-notes.

"It was very unfortunate she had not come sooner. Mrs. Geith, poor woman, had been there that very afternoon."

"Wanting to know my name, and the name of the church where Mr. Geith and I were married?"

"Just so," and Mrs. Foss began to wish that she had not gratified the first wife's laudable curiosity.

"And you told her, you know, — and you told her?"

"I did."

"Then, Mrs. Foss, I may tell you this, — I never liked you much, and now I hate you."

Having acquainted Mrs. Foss with which fact, Beryl, who had never sat down during the interview, never been offered a chair, opened the drawing-room and hall-door for herself, and walked out, leaving both open behind her."

"I would not shut them," said Beryl, as Mark helped her into the carriage; and after relieving her mind of this purely feminine display of temper, she fell to wondering what would be her adversary's next move in the game.

They were not destined to be kept long in suspense. Next day but one, George Geith, walking out of Fen Court, was met in the passage by a couple of men, who took him into custody on a charge of feloniously intermarrying with Beryl Molozane, his first wife being still alive.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

## GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY.

THERE could be no question about Mrs. George Geith No. 1 being an exceedingly clever woman.

She was one of those persons whose talents a virtuous public are so often in the habit of feelingly regretting have not been employed to better purpose.

“If he, or she,” says society, “had but expended his (or her) talents in some useful undertaking, what a blessing it would have been for him (or her) and for the world at large.”

Which is so Christian a regret, that it seems almost a pity to suggest that God and the devil give very different gifts to their children, and that consequently the description of cleverness which brings forth good fruits in the service of the one, as often as not produces hopeless stupidity in the service of the other.

To Mrs. Geith the devil had been very liberal, and if she had not made as much as she might of the capital with which he set her up in life, it was assuredly not owing to any stinginess on the part of her friend and patron.

As a whole she had been lazy; she had neglected her opportunities. With her particular talents, with her personal appearance, with her fondness for intrigue and stratagem, Mrs. Geith might have run a gloriously bad career, but as it was, she had tried to do too much — she had asked impossibilities.

She had wanted to be thought respectable, and yet to live

disreputably ; she had wanted to stay in Egypt with the flesh-pots, and yet cross over to the promised land ; so that on the whole, even in the devil's army, she was not of much use, unless it might be for the purpose of harassing Christian people, and making them occasionally weary of their lives.

Under the peculiar circumstances in which she was placed, Mrs. Geith had not found it by any means so easy a matter to get her husband taken into custody as she had imagined she should find it. With all domestic affairs, the law is (fortunately) chary of interfering. It feels, and justly, that more especially between man and wife, it stands in the unenviable position of a strange third party ; and being wiser than most third parties, it does not care to mix itself up with matrimonial quarrels, and rarely has anything to do with them, until the matter in dispute is forced upon it ; until, in fact, it can decently withhold assistance no longer.

Mrs. Geith had thought she could as easily send her husband to prison as she could walk across the street, but in this Mrs. Geith found she was mistaken ; and as Beryl would not help her in the matter, and as Beryl's friends — if she had any — were not to be got at so easily as though London were a country village with only half a dozen houses in it, the "ill-used wife," as she styled herself, had to go through no end of unpleasant adventures before George was taken into custody, as duly stated at the end of the last chapter.

To say the least of it, Mrs. Geith adopted a most ingenious plan of action. To have remained in her lodgings would have been to lay open her plans to the enemy ; to prepare them for what was coming ; to rob the pleasure she intended to give George of half its charm ; whilst on the other hand to dog the footsteps of her victims ; to pursue them from pillar to post ; to harass them secretly whilst carrying on her great scheme of revenge ; all this was quite in Mrs. Geith's best manner, and occasioned her infinite delight and satisfaction.

To find out Beryl's maiden name, to discover the church where she had been married, to ascertain after that where

her friends lived, and which amongst them would be the most likely to take up the prosecution, were the objects to which Mrs. Geith directed her attention, and they were objects which she might have pursued long enough, but for the assistance afforded to her by Mrs. Foss, *née* Gilling.

Without the slightest trouble ; with the help merely of a little judicious flattery of Mrs. Foss, and sundry depreciating remarks concerning Beryl ; by dint of admiring Mrs. Foss's house, and observing, with emotion, what a blessing it was she had not (like the speaker) been entrapped into a marriage with such a wretch as George Geith, she got all the information she wanted, and a great deal more besides.

She learnt that Beryl's friends had not liked the match ; that they were wealthy ; that they were proud. She heard of a certain stately Mrs. Elsenham, who lived at Kensington, with whom Beryl had resided after her father's death, and who had been highly indignant at the match. All this pleasant and desirable information Mrs. Geith was made free of by Mrs. Foss, who was certainly greatly scandalized when she found out with what manner of woman she had been so confidential.

Had Mrs. Foss met Mrs. Geith in the character she represented when Sir Mark dragged her from beneath the feet of the cab-horse in Gresham Street, that respectable matron would have gathered her skirts decorously round her, and uplifted her nose in the air. Certainly she would not have asked her to lunch, and discussed the rights and wrongs of married ladies over cold ham and bottled stout.

"How is one to know? dear, dear, how is one to know?" sighed Gertrude to her husband, when future revelations made her stand aghast ; "and how is one to know, indeed," if, as poor Mrs. Foss imagined, a black moire antique dress, a quiet bonnet, a velvet cloak and sables (real sables, as Mrs. Bemmidge was duly informed) make the worst woman living respectable, — the lowest of the low presentable, — notwithstanding the silk and the velvet cover, like charity, a multitude of sins.

Was it not excusable in Mrs. Foss to be taken in, when that old woman of the world, that wise, prudent, orthodox, saintly Mrs. Elsenham, received her visitor with, figuratively speaking, open arms?

Many circumstances conspired to make the intelligence, though terribly shocking, acceptable to Mrs. Elsenham. Primarily, she hated George Geith; secondly, her liver was out of order, and she consequently wanted some object on which to vent her ill-humor; thirdly, she had had a great quarrel with Matilda; and, fourthly, she had just parted with her tenth companion, and thought in a moment how admirably Beryl could supply her place.

As for the child, of course Mr. Geith must see to that; equally, as a matter of course, Beryl would be only too thankful to return to Kensington.

"A nice mess she made of it," remarked the old lady, with a certain Christian satisfaction.

"And so she is living on with him! what of that, where would you have the girl to go to, when she has not a relation in the world; who would take her in but myself?"

"It is no wonder she is afraid to come to me, either; for although I, perhaps, ought not to say it of myself, I believe there is not another woman in London besides Maria Elsenham, who would receive the girl back again, after her shameful ingratitude and treachery."

"Then, madam, you will take the matter up?" ventured Mrs. Geith. "I—I have no friends, I have no one like you to see me righted," and the virtuous and ill-used wife had recourse to her pocket-handkerchief.

From behind this ambush, she could see Mrs. Elsenham grimly surveying her dress.

"The old hag is calculating how much it cost," thought Mrs. George Geith; and, still keeping the handkerchief to her face, she went on,—

"I am sure if I had not had money of my own, how I should have lived all these years I can't imagine. I must



have gone on the parish or died in a ditch. When he left the Church" ——

"The wicked little wretch," groaned Mrs. Elsenham.

"When he left the Church I lost all trace of him, and it was by the merest accident, through a casual meeting with his cousin, Sir Mark Geith, I learnt he was still living, and in London."

Straightway Mrs. Elsenham sent for her solicitor. With all convenient speed that gentleman arrived, thinking the lady was about to alter her will for the thirty-first time. Great, therefore, was his astonishment when Mrs. Elsenham informed him she wished the man who had married her grand-daughter taken into custody at once.

"On a charge of bigamy," said the old lady, triumphantly; and if I say that she smacked her lips after the sentence, I trust I shall not be accused either of vulgarity or exaggeration. Had Beryl known whose hand it was that flung her husband into prison, she would have gone off to Kensington forthwith and frightened her grandmother into a fit with her vehement reproaches, with her passionate sorrow. As it was, however, fortunately, perhaps, for all parties, Beryl was located in Halkin Street with Lady Geith, who had taken the poor wife to her heart and her affections at once.

Meantime George had been brought up before the magistrate, had been examined and remanded, had been brought up again, and finally bailed out by Mr. Finch, of Fore Street, and his cousin, Sir Mark Geith.

The case was one which, as the magistrate was kind enough to remark, it would be improper for him to deal with summarily. It must go before a jury; and before a jury, in due course, George Geith had the pleasure of appearing.

"It was a peculiar case," as the counsel for the prosecution observed to the court — "a very peculiar case;" and at this point he got his double eye-glasses on his nose again, and referred to his brief. "It was peculiar in all its bearings. He, the learned counsel, might indeed safely affirm, it

was the most peculiar case in which, in the whole course of his experience, he had ever been engaged."

Having by this time got his eye-glasses into focus, and made the audience desirous of a change, he proceeded to state the case. He told how the prisoner at the bar had at a very early period of life married the unfortunate lady who had the misfortune to be Mrs. George Geith; how he had deserted her; how, on her applying to him for maintenance, on her demanding that he should acknowledge her as his wife, he had disappeared from Morelands, and left her destitute.

"When do we find this man again?" continued the learned counsel, surveying the court over his eye-glasses, which he had now got firmly fixed on the very end of his nose — "when and how do we meet once more with the Rev. George Geith? Has he been abroad? has he been Christianizing the savages of Africa? has he been giving his services to the Church to which he devoted himself? has he been existing on some poor stipend in a country parish, or laboring amongst the wretched inhabitants of an East of London district? No such thing," and the learned counsel grew at this point quite vehement and emphatic; "no such thing. He had left the Church, — mark you that, gentlemen of the jury, — and he living with his second wife in affluence in Fen Court.

"Fen Court might not, he admitted, seem to the gentlemen of the jury the precise locality which a man of Mr. Geith's birth, education, and means would select for a residence; but he (the learned counsel) was in a position to prove to them (the gentlemen of the jury) that Mr. Geith had chosen to live in Fen Court, not from any want of money, but simply because he thought he should thereby be better able to escape detection. He should merely briefly notice, in conclusion, the circumstances under which Mr. Geith contracted his second marriage; and after that he would call such witnesses as could not fail to convince the enlightened and respectable jury, which he had the privilege of address-

ing, that the prisoner at the bar was guilty of the offence laid to his charge ; guilty in fact, guilty in intent, guilty without an extenuating circumstance in his favor, and as such deserving of the extremest punishment which the law of the land could inflict."

It is strange how different the tale of a man's life seems when recounted by another, to what it has done when he has thought over it himself.

In the one case, he has not been called upon to give a reason for every minute action, day by day ; the story has been written, and he in looking back has known that, day by day, there was some feeling or motive or fear sufficiently strong to account for the manner in which each line was traced, and has been lenient to himself accordingly.

But when another condenses the story, and repeats it for him ! Ah ! my friends, it is quite another matter then. We never know what cowards, what wretches, what sinners, what misers, what extravagant self-indulgent creatures we have been till our enemy opens our eyes ; and, on the other hand, we now quite know how well we have struggled, how sick to death we have been, how forbearing and long-suffering we have proved ourselves, through what trials and troubles we have passed with calm faces, till some friend takes to dramatizing our poor tale, and gives it a force and an excitement and an interest it never possessed for us.

A man, as a rule, paints his own life for himself in neutral tints. If he wish to see all the dark shades filled in, on the one side, all the virtues illuminated with a golden halo on the other, he must stand in the dock, as George Geith did, and hear his story — the prisoner's — read out by the counsel for the prosecution.

According to that learned individual, George was the very incarnation of the Evil One. He deserted his wife, he left the Church, he amassed money, honorably he (the counsel) trusted. To have heard that really respectable gentleman holding forth, one might have thought George was a

devourer of widows' houses, a deliberate destroyer of domestic happiness, a roaring lion going up and down the earth, first in the Church, and then out of it, looking out for money to appropriate, and girls to marry and desert.

His very years of servitude were spoken of as golden hours of liberty, in which he was amassing wealth; his lonely, desolate life in Fen Court, as a period when he was free to work out his nefarious plans without check of any kind. Every act of his existence, — the best, the most innocent, — was somehow twisted round into wickedness by this man; till George himself, worn by sorrow, filled with self-reproach, began to wonder whether, after all, it might not be true; whether he could ever have wrought such wretchedness for himself and Beryl had he not been as great a sinner, as unprincipled a villain, as great a fool, as the counsel, eye-glasses in one hand and brief in the other, now he had got well into his speech, asserted.

How would it go with him? Everything seemed to point to his guilt; every circumstance seemed unfavorable to the supposition of his innocence.

On those letters, — those letters that had lain so long forgotten, — he had depended for his immediate acquittal; he had produced them before the magistrate, thinking he should be liberated at once; he had felt no anxiety on the subject until recently; but now, the learned counsel, speaking of those letters, implied that George himself was the author of them; that it was all a cleverly contrived trick of his own devising. Supposing he could not prove his wife had written them, what then? why, then, imprisonment or transportation; and George, in his terror, as the idea occurred to him, looked at the jury, to see what impression the learned counsel's speech was producing on them.

If ever a jury had determined beforehand to serve their country and avenge their own wrongs by "hanging somebody," the twelve who sat in judgment assuredly composed it.

Before coming into court they had prejudged this "run-away clergyman;" this "gentleman in business;" this "wolf" who had hid himself in the city to conceal his nefarious practices. They were as sure of his guilt, as — they were — that — that their stick was of wood. He had the look of a scoundrel.

It was an insult to a respectable body of gentlemen that a "feller" like that "should stand a-staring at them," as the foreman remarked to the individual who sat next to him. "Bigamy ought to be put down, and it should; the ruffian ought to be punished, and he should. If a man could not content himself with one wife, he must be made to smart for it. What security would be left for parents, what safety for daughters, if such villains were permitted to escape scot free?"

All this George Geith read in the twelve faces turned towards him, whenever the learned counsel launched a thunderbolt at his head; all this the learned counsel put into words for them, — into words that branded the prisoner as a monster of iniquity, and caused the audience to whisper that he must be "a regular bad 'un — out and out."

On the prisoner himself the speech of the learned counsel produced, as I have said, a decidedly disheartening effect; but just when his spirits were sinking below zero, help and encouragement came to him from a most unexpected quarter — namely, from Mr. Richard Elsenham, who, though on the bench, where, together with Sir Mark Geith and a number of notables who had come to hear the trial, he had been accommodated with a seat, winked at the prisoner in a manner which clearly intimated that he, Mr. Elsenham, thought the "old humbug had done the best he could in return for his grandmother's guineas, but that it was all 'bosh' and 'rub-bish.'"

The learned counsel saw the look of intelligence, and knowing who Dick Elsenham was, reddened with passion. The foreman saw it, and taking the "young swell," with his

bloated face and insolent swagger, for a friend of the man with two wives, put another cross against George's name in his mental note-book. It was very ill-bred ; it was very imprudent ; but it reassured the accused more than any kind actions could have done. For the first time in his life he really liked Richard Elsenham, and felt grateful to him.

Meantime the witnesses for the prosecution were being examined. Evidence of the first marriage was adduced. Evidence of the second likewise. To George's grief, Mr. Hayles was called to speak, not for, but against him, and the poor old clergyman told what he knew hesitatingly and mournfully.

His hesitation and sorrow told against the prisoner. Apparently, everything was working in his disfavor ; everything seemed to have had such a twist that the very sources from which he expected help only made the case for the prosecution stronger ; and when his own counsel rose to speak in his defence, George felt that, with all the evidence which he could bring forward, it would be but after all a toss up whether he was convicted or not.

Very different was the speech of the learned counsel for the defence, to that of the learned counsel for the prosecution. Plain and unvarnished was the tale he told ; plain and unembellished as that I have told, feebly though it may be, to tell to you. Back through the years he went, to the youth of the man you have never known except as middle aged. He spoke of the promise of that youth ; of the seeds of promise it contained ; of the hopeful years that lay before the boy, for he was little more than a boy, said the counsel, pityingly, when he met the woman he unhappily married. Nearly related to a wealthy and ancient house, with talents above the average, with fair prospects, with life before him to make what he chose out of, he met with an artful, designing, unprincipled woman, older than himself in years, and double his age in knowledge of the world, in experience of the evil that is in the world, courted her, and eventually married her.

“I lay no stress, gentlemen of the jury,” proceeded the learned counsel for the defence, “on the fact that he was entrapped into that marriage, for that is beside the question. I freely admit that he did marry her; that, in the sight of God and man, he took her for better for worse, for richer for poorer. Gentlemen,” went on the learned counsel, “there is one cause for which, according to the law of England, a man may separate himself from his wife, although there is no reservation to that effect in the Matrimonial Service of the Church — that cause is unfaithfulness.

“Ere long, my unhappy client discovered his wife to be unfaithful; and there can be no question but that he would have inflicted summary punishment on the partner of her guilt, but that both fled from the wrath of the injured husband. At that juncture it was Mrs. Geith who deserted my client, and not my client who deserted her.”

Great dissatisfaction was here evident among the jury; the case for the prosecution had been so clear, they could have convicted upon it at once; but the case for the defence was perplexing, and they began to move uneasily upon their seats. Meantime the counsel for the prisoner proceeded:—

“In the days of which I speak, divorce was a luxury unobtainable by any save persons possessed of large incomes: my client was poor. Had the misadventure I have referred to occurred at the present day, he could speedily have freed himself from all old ties, and walked out into the world unfettered; as it was, he walked out into the world it is true, but burdened by an unfaithful wife, — bound down by the weight of a secret he was ashamed to acknowledge.”

Lightly the learned counsel passed over the time George spent at Morelands. All things considered, perhaps that was the time of the person's life which best would bear scrutiny; but in describing the interview between the curate and his abandoned wife; in telling how the money he had saved for the purpose of procuring a divorce was wrung from him by the threat of exposure; in speaking of his flight

from Morelands, of his renunciation of the Church, and of the living the Church held for him, the counsel was at home. It was a sad tale, and he told it well, — so well, that the females began to have recourse to their pocket-handkerchiefs, whilst the men remarked, — “Life had been hard times with him after all.”

From that point the counsel grew eloquent; his hard struggles in London, his fight for bread, his brave battle, his ultimate success; these things became, in the hands of the accustomed orator, weapons of strength. He could tell of the hops deferred; he could speak of the reward delayed; he could speak of days of trial, of nights of anxiety, of labor, such as none save those who had themselves labored could understand; of hardships encountered, of difficulties vanquished, such as no man who had not himself borne the heat and burden of the day could comprehend.

Without friends, without capital, without previous business training, he had made his way up. He had sent money to his wife, and that till he was rid of her; till she had no husband, he no wife; she might live honestly if she would.

He had sent to her, no matter what he lacked himself; and he had saved; he had, with all a miser's eagerness, with more than a miser's pertinacity, laid pound to pound, so that he might one day be rid of the woman who had darkened and cursed his life.

“In the midst of all this working and saving,” went on the learned counsel, “liberty came to my client. He heard his wife was dead; heard it, as he believed, from the Hon. and Rev. Mr. Clayfield, who will be produced as a witness. At first he thought the intention might be a trick, a ruse to ascertain his whereabouts, but when a certificate of burial, a certificate which shall be submitted to you, was forwarded to him, he thought the news was true; he looked upon himself as a single man.”

Doubtless, admitted counsel, Mr. Geith was unwise not to proceed at once to Cornwall, and ascertain particulars for



himself; but, he argued, if letters purporting to be written by a clergyman whose name appeared in the "Clerical Directory"; if a telegraphic message, if a certificate of burial could not be taken as evidence of death, what could? He put it to them as men of sense (which I may remark they were not), as men of reason (which counsel in his heart knew they had not), as men of feeling (which phrase counsel used as a mere *façon de parler*), which could be taken. He, the learned counsel, confessed himself unable to answer his own question, and dropped it accordingly.

"Besides," he explained, "the journey would have been expensive, inconvenient, and painful, while there lay the proofs. If Mr. Clayfield's letters were, as it now turned out they were, forgeries, was his unfortunate client answerable for that? Certainly not. If the failure of Norton's bank, a failure which would be remembered throughout the country almost as long as the South Sea Bubble, prevented his client marrying his second wife publicly, and surrounded by the orthodox number of bridesmaids, was he to be branded as a villain in consequence?"

"Had he been cruel to that wife? Had he deserted her? In the course of this most painful trial it had been made a point against the prisoner that he had continued to live with his second wife after the first reappeared before him; but he thought that, on consideration, his learned friend would see that fact told rather in his client's favor than otherwise. Had he been harsh to her, she would gladly have left him; had he deliberately betrayed her, she would have been there to give evidence against him that day; but as it was, he first wished to spare her grief, and she subsequently wished to soothe his grief;" and the learned counsel forthwith drew such a picture of Beryl, and the happiness of their wedded life, that George Geith could not bear it, but bowed his head on the front of the dock while he listened.

Not an atom affected, however, were the jurors. They looked only at the stern parts of the case, not at the senti-

mental and pathetic. To these, Mrs. Geith was an ill-used, and rather a desirable wife; Beryl merely an imprudent young woman, with an ill-regulated mind, who ought to have known better.

One by one George's witnesses were examined, and cross-examined; not a stone had Sir Mark left unturned, which was likely to be of service to his cousin. He had striven hard to find out a previous husband for Mrs. Geith; failing that, he got together any people he could who were willing and able to prove that she had left George, and that George had not left her.

Out of the past rose a cloud of witnesses who, one and all, bore testimony to Mrs. Geith's shortcomings. If her husband had liked to resist her claim, as his counsel remarked, he need never have crippled himself to allow her sixpence; but instead of resisting her claim, he had made her, for his poor means, an ample allowance, which all passed through my hands, Mr. Tettin stated on oath. The examination of Mr. Tettin was, in its way, quite a little romance. "The Rev. George Geith," he said, "first called at my office immediately after his flight from Morelands. He communicated to him (Mr. Tettin) all the circumstances which induced him to relinquish his curacy; he told him every particular connected with his unfortunate marriage, and further informed him that, so soon as he could make (or save) sufficient money to obtain a divorce, he intended to do so. For seven years," proceeded Mr. Tettin, "I remitted twenty-five pounds every six months to his wife. How, out of a clerk's salary, he ever managed to send so much to her, I do not know; he never increased that sum; in my opinion it was ample, and had he asked my opinion, which he never did on any subject, I should have told him so.

"It was in the summer of 1847 those letters came into my hands. I was out of town when they were delivered at my office, but on my return I forwarded the three, *i. e.* the two letters and the telegraphic message, to Mr. Geith. Di-

rected them to the Rev. George Geith, care of Grant & Co., accountants, Fen Court, City. Did not know till afterwards that Mr. Geith was Grant & Co. Did not know he passed in the city under the name of Gregory Grant. If I had known it, should have considered he had sufficient reason for doing so.

“ Had never any doubt but that Mr. Clayfield wrote those letters until a conversation occurred between Mr. Clayfield and myself, in which he stated ” ——

The learned counsel for the prosecution here intimated a wish that Mr. Tettin would confine himself to facts within his own knowledge.

The learned counsel for the defence maintained Mr. Tettin had a right to repeat what had passed in conversation between himself and Mr. Clayfield.

The learned judge decided that such evidence was admissible, but kindly offered to make a note of the objection.

The learned counsel for the prosecution thanked his lordship, and wished the note made.

While his lordship was making it, the learned counsel for the defence said he would not examine Mr. Tettin about the conversation with Mr. Clayfield, as that gentleman himself would repeat what he had said on the subject.

After this useful and entertaining digression, Mr. Tettin was allowed to describe that interview with the prisoner, at which the reader was likewise present, and further to communicate to the jury all the facts that had come to his knowledge up to the moment of speaking.

The great points elicited from him, and which no cross-examination could shake, were, that the money had passed through his hands; that for seven years it had been regularly paid; that he himself had transmitted it to Cambridge, and that he had duly received acknowledgments of its arrival there. Further, likewise, through him Mr. Geith had forwarded money to the Rev. Mr. Clayfield to defray the expenses of his wife's funeral.

“A regular statement was returned to my letter,” proceeded Mr. Tettin, “and a sum of three shillings and sevenpence returned to me in postage-stamps, said sum being the balance remaining after payment of the charges incurred.”

All those letters, receipts, and statements, together with the certificate of burial, were duly produced in court, after which proceeding the Honorable and Reverend Mr. Clayfield swore, that towards the latter end of the year 1846, his wife being in delicate health, he engaged, as attendant on her, — half attendant and half companion, — a person whom he now believed to be Mrs. Geith, but who was recommended to him, by a clergyman in Cambridgeshire, under the name of Matthews. In the summer of 1847, he and his wife went abroad for a couple of months. During their absence Mrs. Matthews was left in charge of the vicarage. During that period the letters now shown to him must have been written. He kept his note-paper, letter-paper, and envelopes, in a drawer in his library table. That drawer he never locked. Undoubtedly any person in the house could have helped him or herself to paper, had they been so minded. Sealing-wax, and a seal, with his crest and motto cut upon it, lay on an inkstand, which usually stood on the library table. The paper on which the letter produced was written, was similar to that he ordinarily used. Except when in mourning, he always used red wax; and he had no doubt whatever but that the envelope now shown him had been sealed by his wax and stamped with his seal. The handwriting was not his. It was a clever imitation, but it was not his.

To the Judge: “The imitation is close enough to deceive a casual observer.”

To the Foreman: “I can swear the letter is not in my handwriting, because I never wrote such a letter, and never, to my knowledge, had a person of the name lived in my parish.”

To a Juror: “Am quite certain I could not have forgotten such a correspondence, had it ever taken place.

“How Mrs. Matthews contrived to obtain the requisite form for the certificate, I am quite unable to conjecture. Presume, however, she must have obtained it somehow, as I see the certificate here.”

To the Foreman: “Had such a death and burial taken place in the parish, an entry to that effect would be made at Somerset House. Am bound” —

Mr. Clayfield was wearily proceeding, when the Judge remarked, that, as there was no dispute about Mrs. Geith being alive, he thought it was unnecessary to go further into the question of her burial.

“Whilst we were abroad, Mrs. Matthews wrote saying that she should like to leave, having obtained a situation as housekeeper, which promised to be permanent. That situation was with a Mr. Solland, whose estates are in Cornwall, though he spent most of his time either in London or on the Continent. I gave Mrs. Matthews a good character; I had no reason to do otherwise, having always considered her a very trustworthy and superior person.”

When the examination and cross-examination of the Hon. Mr. Clayfield was ended, the judge looked towards the jury as though he expected some intimation from them; but the jury, still dissatisfied with Mr. Geith, still feeling that the forgery of the letters had not been brought home to the first wife, made up their twelve minds that they would disappoint the judge, and bring the prisoner in guilty.

It had been a toss-up, but now George Geith felt the scale was turning against him, when another, and to him most unlooked-for, witness appeared in the box, — a witness hunted up by Mark from the remote ends of the earth, — who, being duly sworn, stated himself to be Reginald Solland.

He knew Mrs. Matthews; he had engaged her as housekeeper. She had left him without a character; had refused to give her one. She had been in his service twelve months. Believed she hoped to be made Mrs. Solland.

Passed herself off as a widow. Desired her to look out for another situation when he first began to suspect her design. Refused to give her a character, not because she had planned to become Mrs. Solland, but because she had forged orders to different tradespeople, and obtained goods on the strength of those orders. I threatened her at the time to give her in charge," said Mr. Solland, composedly, "and I am sorry now that I did not. I see the person who called herself Mrs. Matthews in court now," went on this inexorable gentleman, with a perfectly placid manner and unruffled expression; and he pointed out Mrs. Geith, to the great disgust of the foreman, who thought that, but for the evidence of this Cornish squire, they would have known exactly how to deal with the prisoner at the bar.

As it was, after the judge had told the jury, as plainly as he could speak, that they must acquit him, they sent back to ask him if they could not find him guilty of bigamy, with a recommendation to mercy because he did not know he was doing it.

If a judge ever swears (in silence, of course, I mean), that judge inwardly anathematized that jury; but with an outward patience which it was really touching to witness, he repeated to them what he had said before, and assured them that if they believed the evidence which had been laid before them, they must acquit the prisoner. If they did not believe the evidence, it would then be their duty to return a verdict of guilty.

What they might eventually have done, how many times they would have mystified themselves over the contradiction that the man had committed bigamy, and yet, that, according to the judge's ruling, he had not committed it, that he had married two wives, and yet that he had not married the second, is uncertain, had a traitor not suddenly appeared in the camp, in the person of a refractory oilman, who declared he would take the judge's word before the foreman's; that he knew if they brought the prisoner in

guilty, they would be sent back again; so that for his part he thought the first wife a bad lot, and that the man had done very fair and handsome by her.

Further, the oilman remarked that it was getting late, and that for his part he should like some supper.

The mention of supper proved too much for the jury. They rose in a body, and requested the foreman to return a verdict of—"Not Guilty."

Which the foreman did; but to the last hour of his life the law of bigamy puzzled his understanding; and though Mr. Geith walked out of court a free man, one at least of his jurors was as much dissatisfied with the verdict as Mrs. Geith herself.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

## PARTED. \*

TILL the trial was ended, the verdict returned, the excitement over, the anxiety past and gone, George and Beryl had never felt that they had ceased to be man and wife, that they were separated from one another. It was only when the daily routine of existence had to be commenced again, when he went back to his office, and she to the little employments and petty occupations of a woman's life, that they felt the truth and length and depth of the gulf lying between them, that they began to be afraid of the future, to dread looking towards the morrow, aware that each morrow as it came could only bring greater loneliness than its predecessor.

To Beryl, indeed, the separation did not appear so frightful as to George. She had hope to sustain her, which he had not. Delusive as a rainbow though the comfort might be which Sir Mark had held out to her, still Beryl, knowing no better, ran on after the rainbow like a child.

He had told her George could get a divorce from his first wife, fully believing what he said; and now, when he learnt he had been mistaken, he lacked courage to reveal the truth to her; he felt what he said to his wife, that he had rather go hang himself than see the same look in her face again which he had seen there once.

No one in the house had more courage than Mark; no one dared to pull away the last plank from under her feet, to cut the last feeble rope to which she was clinging, to tell



her that nothing but death could now free George from his first wife, that whilst she lived he could never marry any one.

She had laid the balm to her heart, that he could obtain a divorce; that she should some day, some day not very far distant, perhaps, be able to go home again, and live with him once more. She had pictured to herself days of happiness in that sweet cottage he had lately taken for her. Life without George — that idea never entered her mind. An earth without a sun would have seemed as rational to Beryl.

Every word of the trial she read, seated in the drawing-room at Halkin Street, — every word; and the paper was blistered with tears when she had finished. “To think of my being ever angry with him,” she reflected; “to think of that time when I felt as if I could have left him!” And the loving creature never stopped to ask herself how far she would have gone without turning back to welcome his footsteps on his threshold once more.

As for George, when he heard by what promises Beryl had been reconciled to her separation, when he knew with what hopes she was looking forward to the future, he almost raved in the extremity of his distress.

To lawyer after lawyer he repaired for advice, for assistance; but lawyer after lawyer repeated what the wretched man knew too well already, — that he had by his own act, of his own free will, barred himself from a divorce; that the old law and the new law alike refused help to such as he; that not all the judges in England, not all the money in Lombard Street, could give him freedom now.

He could not tell it to her; he could not write it. He went about his business mechanically during the day, and at night returned to Snaresbrook, to the house which was dear to him, because she had liked it, because they had wandered through the forest glades together, because she had left in every room traces of her presence; because she had gone

forth from that place, not as though she had intended to stay away from it forever, but merely as she might have gone out for a day or two, leaving her work-basket here, her half-finished embroidery there, her music littering about the piano, something belonging to her in every nook and corner.

So the days passed by, and Beryl began to sicken for tidings of her husband. She asked why he did not come to Halkin Street. She watched for the postman; she wrote to him, entreating him to answer. She inquired of Sir Mark, of Cissy, of Lady Geith, if he were ill, if he were dead; and, at last, reading in their faces, that though he might be neither ill nor dead, she insisted on going down to Snaresbrook. "To tell him something, to give him something," said the poor child; "and then I will be patient; I will, indeed."

Patient! till when? Sir Mark and his wife exchanged glances as she spoke; but neither tried to prevent her. Perhaps both felt that it would be better for George and Beryl to meet again, for her to learn from his lips that what she hoped, and was looking forward to, might never be — never — so long as the sun rose and set upon the earth.

They thought George might break the shock to her, as none of them could. They expected, if she saw him once more, if they talked over the happy past, over the lonely future, quietly and sorrowfully together, she might be better content to submit to the inevitable separation, more reconciled to the solitary life that lay before her.

They had advised George not to come and see her, hoping that absence would teach her what they were afraid to tell; but now they yielded to her wish to go to Snaresbrook; and she went over there accordingly, accompanied by Sir Mark and Lady Geith.

Cissy had declined being one of the party totally. Seeing more of Beryl than any of the others; listening to her moaning complaints; watching her through the days as she fretted and sobbed and wandered restlessly about the house,

Cissy understood that the visit was likely to prove a more painful one than she cared to witness. She knew from the time Beryl decided on taking Walter with her, that she had not the faintest idea how matters really stood; and though Cissy tried to shake her faith a little, endeavored to prepare her for the shock, Beryl proved wonderfully obtuse; but talked on about seeing George, wondering how he would look, how he was, what had kept him from her, hoping he had not forgotten her, trusting he was not ill, till the rector's daughter, who had loved George so much herself in the old days at Morelands, could bear it no longer, but went and implored Mark to tell Beryl the worst, to give her some faint idea of what awaited her at Snaresbrook.

Mark would have done it if he could, but he felt that if she were unable to guess at the truth herself, if his absence, if his silence, had told her nothing of the shadow lying across her path, George himself was the only person who ought to speak to her on the subject; that, if he could not make the blow lighter to her, no person on earth could.

"I think they will be better after they have seen one another," said Mark, — "only I wish she was not quite so excited about the matter. If I had known how the law stood, I would have driven many a mile rather than gone there to raise false hopes; but we will see what George will say; surely her visit will bring matters to a crisis."

Flushed with excitement, trembling with eagerness, Beryl talked and chattered most of the way down; but as they passed Leytonstone and Wanstead, and drew nearer and nearer to the house, she began to shiver, and to wonder whether or not she ought to turn back.

"Do you think he will be glad to see me? Do you really think he will not be angry at me for coming?"

"Angry, my child! what can make you think of such a thing?" and Lady Geith took one of Beryl's hot, burning hands in hers, and held it tenderly.

"Because, you know, he may have been waiting till he

had some very good news, some certain news, I mean ; and if so, he would think me impatient and wearisome. But I have tried to be patient, — have I not ?” and Beryl turned her eyes on Lady Geith with a beseeching, entreating look, that would have melted a heart of stone.

“ My dear, you must not doubt George ; you must not, indeed, no matter what happens.”

“ I do not doubt him, only I hope he will not be vexed,” said Beryl ; and she looked out, as she spoke, at the groups of holiday-makers, who had come out from London to spend Sunday under the shade of those grand old trees, which are now, alas ! also disappearing under the axe and hatchet. She had chosen Sunday for her visit, because on that day she was certain of finding George at home and at leisure.

She had written to tell him she should come, and he stood now looking and watching for her arrival, ready to lift her to the ground the moment the carriage stopped.

Beryl ! — George ! — It was all they said ; but Mark saw his cousin’s lip tremble, and the big tears rolling down Beryl’s cheeks, as they walked together into the house hand in hand.

“ George, you are not angry with me ?” Beryl began, when they reached the drawing-room. “ I could not stay away longer ; I could not live without hearing from you, — without knowing you were well.”

She was standing looking up in his face, and she could see, even through her tears, how George was struggling to control himself.

“ And I have brought you Walter,” she went on ; “ I shall be happier to know he is with you, because then I can never feel afraid of your forgetting me.”

“ Forgetting you, Beryl !” and the man’s voice was full of anguish, as though he were striving to bear some grievous inward pain.

“ If I leave Walter with you, then I must sometimes come here to see him, — sometimes, you understand, George.

till — till ” —— and Beryl stopped and hesitated, hesitated though she had been his wife, for something in his manner frightened her.

“Till what, Beryl, till what, my own precious darling? Have none of you told her?” he added, turning to Mark. “Good God! has she no idea? has no one prepared her for it?”

Mark could not answer; he remembered well how he had misled her in that very room, and he could not now open his lips to destroy the castle he had assisted her to build.

“Prepared me for what, George?” she asked; “oh, do you tell me; do you tell me. Do not let anybody else tell me, whatever it may be, — whatever it may be. Are you tired of me? Are you sorry you ever saw me? Have I been a grief and a trouble to you, George? If I have, I will try to make it up to you hereafter, only do not say you have ceased loving me; don’t say that.”

In her tears she was getting almost incoherent; and as she held out her arms for him to take her, as she might have done had she been a child, George Geith felt all the courage ebbing away from his heart, all power to answer her truly deserting him.

“I do love you, darling; I shall love you forever and forever,” he replied, taking her to his heart, and laying the poor, weary head gently on his shoulder. “God is my witness that I could as soon forget Him as I could forget you; but, Beryl —— Will neither of you tell her?” he added, turning almost fiercely to his aunt and cousin, “or must I break her heart myself? Why did you let her come here? why did you let her come?”

“Tell me yourself; tell me yourself,” whispered Beryl. “I guess what it is. We cannot be married again, George; you are not able to get a divorce from her.”

“I am not; and while she lives” ——

“George,” —— and she kept her head close to his heart while she spoke, —— “why can’t you get a divorce? Tell me.”

He told her; he stooped down and whispered the reason

in her ear ; he asked her if she understood what he meant, and she made a movement of assent in answer.

After a minute or two, she lifted her face, and asked Sir Mark and Lady Geith to leave them alone together. But when they were alone, she said no word to the man whom she loved so devotedly. He could not speak to her ; she could not speak to him. Straining her to his heart, he wrestled with his agony. Lying passive in his arms, she bade farewell to every hope, to every expectation, to every dream, in silence.

She did not utter any complaint ; she did not ask now to stay with him. She did not say, as she had once said, that unless he put her away she would never leave him.

That was gone and past. She knew now they could not stay together ; that for all they had been to one another, in the sweet times of old, they could never be more than strangers in the bitter time to come.

One thing she did say : she did entreat him to keep the boy. " He will be a link between us, George," she pleaded ; but he refused. He knew it was only her unselfish love for him prompted the request.

" And I swear this to you, Beryl," he finished, " that, if that woman should die, I will marry you again within the week. There is no need for me to tell you this, I know ; but still I swear it, nevertheless."

" I will not think of it," she answered, faintly ; " I will not wish her dead ; and you, George, must try not to wish it either."

At her words, a memory came up out of the past, and made George wince and start.

He thought of the night when Mark dragged his wife from under the wheels of the cab ; when he had prayed she might be killed ; when he had tried to pull his cousin back ; and in his heart George wished again that she had been crushed to pieces ; that she never had been picked up alive.

It was well Beryl did not know what was passing through his mind, for through many and many a weary day to come,

the memory of that sad afternoon, when she and George parted, stole over her heart as the sound of mournful music comes soft and soothing over the waters.

From that far-away land on which they had last stood together, came those quiet tones, those mournful, earnest words, over the separating waters of time and distance, to the woman who travelled through many scenes, — who journeyed to many fair lands with Lady Geith.

Mother, Beryl called her new friend; daughter, Lady Geith loved to style her; but no kindness, no friendship, no tenderness, no love could do much towards restoring Beryl's health and spirits.

It was all in vain that they wintered at Paris; that they followed the sun, and never let the cold wind breathe upon Beryl's face; she was doomed; and when there could be no shadow of doubt about the matter, when her own prayer was to see George and return to England, they came back by slow stages to her native country, — came back but for one purpose, that Beryl might die at home, die near him.

And he, meantime, had been working firmly as of old, so that if ever Beryl and he did come together again, he might surround her with every comfort his love could suggest.

"And, besides, there is the boy," thought George, "there is the boy;" and so he worked on, toiled through the days, and the months, and the years, to the sole end as it seemed for Mark to ask him one day to go to Halkin Street to see Beryl, who was very, very ill.

"Do you mean that she is worse than usual, that she is more than delicate?" asked George, rising from his chair on the instant.

"I do; she is very ill, very seriously ill. I am afraid, George, you will find her sadly altered."

But his cousin did not answer; he was looking for his hat and muttering something to himself, of which Sir Mark only heard the concluding words. "And oh, my God! after all, has it come to this?"

## CHAPTER XLIX.

## TITLE ETERNITY.

It had come to this! the former hereafter was the present; the former present was the past; and stripped of all their glorious promise, disrobed of the rich apparel in which hope had once decked their shadowy forms, the future days he had fought for, longed for, labored for, came to George Geith, bringing with them the sorest trouble of his life.

For he loved Beryl: God alone, who had heard in the darkness his sobbing through the night, alone knew how passionately. She had been to him his all, his life, his joy, his hope, his honor. He had said to himself, that, though they were wandering solitary through weary and separate roads, there must come a point where they would meet at last, never again to be parted. He had prayed for the days of their trial to be shortened as he had never prayed for anything before, as, clergyman though he had been, he once thought it impossible for the created to pray to his Creator for anything. He had talked with the Almighty about his trouble as a man might talk with his friend; he had wearied the Lord with the story of his anguish; he had importuned his Maker to hear the petitions of his wretched, lonely suppliant, and the Omniscient was answering his petition for her to be given back to him by taking her away from him, so far as this earth was concerned, forever. Though the sunshine was streaming into the chamber, the darkest hour he had ever faced, or ever could be called on to face in the future, had come to George Geith. It was darkness visible,



and through it he groped blindly to meet his trouble, fighting madly and impotently against the inevitable sorrow.

She should live, he could not spare her; she must live, the force of her own will, the power of science, a milder climate, love, skill, money, beyond all things the might and strength of his own despair, should keep her with him. For man, for God, whether it were sins, or whether it were virtue, whether in the sight of Heaven they were man and wife, or whether it were criminal for them to stay together, it mattered not to George Geith. They would never part again.

Kneeling beside her, clasping the worn, transparent hands, kissing the wasted cheek, stroking, scarcely knowing what he was doing, the thin hair once so luxuriant, George told Beryl this. Recalling the days when they were together sinfully, yet not sinfully, because they knew no sin, knew of no bar strong enough to keep them asunder, the man went mad in his terrible trouble, and told the woman who had been so loth to part from him that nothing should separate them now, that he would stay with her forever.

Never a youth, standing in the full light of that sun-rising of love, which one man never beholds twice, told such a tale of devotion, of passion, as George Geith poured out then. Never was woman asked to give love back for love, as Beryl was then asked to live; so that they might love one another; not that she might be great and wealthy, not that she might have rank and influence, but simply that heart might think with heart, and that they might live for and with each other.

He would have asked her the same had he not known where the morrow's meal was to come from; and Beryl would have stayed, God help her, if she could.

But between her and him stood Death: before the gate of her earthly Eden there stood a cherubim with flaming sword, which forbade all hope of ever reëntering the paradise where, all innocently, she had dwelt. To all hopes, to all fears, to the long fever, to the terrible suspense, she saw a speedy

termination; she had come, at last, to the page of human existence at the bottom whereof *Finis* is written, and for her there was to be nothing more, whether of joy or of sorrow, added to the volume forever. The short day was drawing to its close — that day which had been lived so fully; the book was written, the tale told, the story ended; and knowing that what he was asking was impossible, — knowing that the question of right and wrong could never be raised between them again, that there could be no more tearful resistance of sin, no more grasping after virtue, — that it was no longer a question of whether she would or no, that the inevitable “must” had come at last, — Beryl, with arms clasped round his neck, with head resting on his shoulder, raining tears over him, said it was of no use talking about what was past and gone, that they must part, and that he knew it.

Then for a moment George misunderstood her. The agony of her own heart, the intense bitterness of the draught she was called upon to drink, the awful hopelessness of her case, and the terrible longing she felt to be permitted to live and love once more, sharpened her voice, and gave it a tone of reproach she never intended.

“Have you grown to doubt me?” he asked. “Do you not know I would marry you to-morrow if I could? Do you think that throughout all the years to come, let them be many or let them be few, I could change to you? Oh, my good Beryl, do you not believe that through time and through eternity I shall love you and none other?”

“I do not doubt; I believe;” and her tears fell faster, and her sobs became more uncontrollable. “But oh, George, it is of no use! I have fought against pain, but it has conquered me at last. Day and night I and Death have battled together, but he has won, and I lost. I would not say to myself I could be dying. I have held on to life as long as I had strength to do it, but now, George — now — oh, my love — my love — my darling!”

And the sharp agony came again into her voice, and she cried out her words like some one in bodily pain ; whilst he, understanding fully what she meant, comprehending that no human strength could hold her, no love help her, strained her to his heart in a silence which with George Geith meant despair.

What was she to him at that moment ? More than wife ; more than all the earth ; more than heaven ; more than life. She was something more, far more, than any poor words we know can express.

What he felt for her was beyond love ; the future he saw stretching away for himself without her, without a hope of her, saw in its blank weariness so terrible as to be beyond despair.

Had the soul been taken out of his body, life could not have been more valueless. Take away the belief of immortality, and what has mortality left to live for. At the moment George Geith knew, in a stupid, dull kind of way, that to him Beryl had been an earthly immortality ; that to have her again for his own, had been the one hope of his weary life, which had made the days and the hours endurable unto him.

Oh, woe for the great waste of love which there is in this world below ! to think how it is filling some hearts to bursting, whilst others are starving for the lack thereof ; to think how it flows, a turbulent river, through lands destitute of inhabitants, while there are deserts in which men dwell that the welcome waters never visit ; how those who may never be man and wife, those who are about to be parted by death, those whose love can never be anything but a sorrow and trial, merge their own identity in that of one another, whilst the lawful hands of respectable households wrangle and quarrel, and honest widows order their mourning with decorous resignation, and disconsolate husbands look out for second wives.

Why is it that the ewe lamb is always selected for sacri-

face? Why is it that the creature upon which man sets his heart shall be the one snatched from him? Why is it that the thing we prize perishes? that as the flower fades, and the grass withereth, so the object of man's love, the delight of his eyes and the desire of his soul, passeth away, leaves him desolate?

On George Geith the blow fell with such force that he groped darkly about, trying to grasp his trouble, trying to meet some tangible form with whom to grapple. Life without Beryl; days without sun; winter without a hope of summer; night that could never know a dawn. My reader, have patience with the despairing grief of this strong man, who had at length met with a sorrow that crushed him.

Have patience whilst I try to tell of the end that came to his business and to his pleasure; to the years he had spent in toil; to the hours in which he had tasted enjoyment; to the struggles there had come success, to the hopes fruition; but with success and with fruition there had come likewise death.

Everything for him was ended in existence. Living, he was as one dead. Wealth could not console him; success could not comfort him; for him, for this hard, firm worker, for the man who had so longed for rest, for physical repose, for domestic pleasures, the flowers were to have no more perfume, home no more happiness, the earth no more loveliness. The first spring blossoms, the summer glory on tree and field, the fruits and flowers, and thousand tinted leaves of autumn, and the snows and frosts of winter, were never to touch his heart or stir his senses in the future.

Never the home he had pictured might be his, — never, oh, never! He had built his dream house on the sands, and behold the winds blow, and the waves beat, and he saw it all disappear, leaving nought but dust and ashes, but death and despair.

Madly he fought with his sorrow, as though it were a living thing that he could grasp and conquer; he turned on it constantly and strove to trample it down.

Could he see her die, and live? Could he ever go on, as through the years to come, knowing no morrow that might ever dawn could bring her back again, that she would never open the door and stand at his hearth, and kneel at his feet, and lay her gentle hand on his burning temples more?

Could he part with her, could he let her go away, and lay the body that had held her in the grave, and still survive?

Oh, God! oh, God! how heavy is Thy hand, when it is laid upon man thus. How despairingly does the creature fight against the sentence of the Creator, and hope for a reverse, for a reprieve, until the mortal has become immortal. How the days and the hours weary by, days and hours that are, nevertheless, all too short and fleeting.

How hard, how almost impossible does the torture seem to bear, and yet still how invariably is humanity forced to bear it, bound on the rack of life.

Day by day, George Geith bore his torment in silence; day by day she glided away from him down the river and away to the sea. With this victim death played few tricks; he did not cover her with the waters one hour and lay her on the bank the next. Lovingly almost he took her in his arms, and bore her gently over the waves of time to the eternal shore.

So gently, so pitifully, so lingeringly he took her, that when he first lost sight of her, George Geith could scarcely tell. When Beryl grew dim, and the something else began to take her place, he never could remember; he only knew there came a time when she ceased to put out her hand to touch his, — when, if he took hers, there came no light into her face, when her eyes bore no look of recognition at his entrance, — when, in a word, “she ceased to take notice of anything, and lay without resistance in the cold arms of that nurse who was hushing her so gently to sleep.”

Before she died, Beryl was gone. She had passed, like the sunshine on the Hertfordshire fields, like the roses in the Dower House garden, away from the sight of the man who

had loved her so passionately, before death claimed her finally for his own.

Girl, bride, wife, heart-broken woman, were all vanished and gone whilst she was yet living and breathing. Beryl, his Beryl, had left him forever, and in her stead there remained something which knew no difference between day and night, between one person and another, between sweet and bitter, evil and good ; which faded, and faded, and faded away, which had a life so like death, that, when death came, the watchers did not know it, but fancied there was life still. And there was life there — life eternal.

## CHAPTER L.

## CONCLUSION.

WHEN Beryl died, the life-story of George Geith of Fen Court must, properly speaking, be considered finished ; for from the day when her body was laid in the family vault at Great Snareham, he looked no more at the trees in the churchyard, or the graves within the iron railings.

He left Fen Court to the occupancy of other men whose footsteps now echo under the archway ; who walk beside the iron railings ; who enter the familiar house and look from the windows of the house we know so well, at the back of the houses in Cullum Street, or over the dreary pavement of Billiter Square.

To another part of London, to a crowded thoroughfare, to a huge warehouse, George Geith conveyed his business, while he, a changed man, extended, with the aid of capital advanced by Lady Geith, till the house of Geith and Geith is at this present time one of the largest and most respectable in the city. Geith and Geith is a *bonâ fide* firm, for Sir Mark has taken to business with a will, and is an active partner in the house.

Snareham was duly sold, that is, the broad acres and the goodly farms, and many a small property besides ; but Snareham Castle, with its stately woods and its fine park, with its noble terraces, its trees, its gardens, and its historical associations, was reserved for George Geith, whose property it now is. Lady Geith resides at the castle with Walter, Beryl's only child ; and when he has leisure to spare from business,

when he is able to leave London for a few days, George Geith lives at the castle, and wanders about the scenes, where he spent so many happy days in boyhood, with his boy, who has Beryl's eyes the father thinks, and whose voice sometimes thrills into the very innermost chambers of George's heart.

In Great Snareham Rectory, the Rev. Mr. Hayles has at length pitched his tent. Mrs. Hayles having succeeded in getting all her daughters off her hands, now occupies herself in seeing that the young women in her husband's parish have no such immoralities as lovers hanging about them.

When she is not employed in this laudable work, she is either toadying Lady Geith, or scolding her husband. She has long since forgiven George for leaving the Church, and thinks that she saw the finger of Providence in it (for herself and Mr. Hayles).

The world has never learnt that Sir Mark Geith was an imposition, and George the rightful heir. Society, which is now kind enough to interest itself greatly about the wealthy owner of Snareham Castle, only knows that some day, if he outlive Sir Mark, he will be a baronet; and that if a certain disreputable Mrs. Geith, who is now quite a respectable lady, residing at Brighton, on a comfortable annuity, were dead, he, Mr. George Geith, could marry again, in which case the son of such marriage would succeed to the title, Walter Geith being illegitimate.

Wherever George Geith goes, his story travels with him; quite romantic amongst young ladies. "Very sad," remark their mammas; and mammas and daughters alike assail the melancholy-looking man, and pay a certain court to him, for he is the fashion, — perhaps because he keeps out of the way of fashion and her votaries.

Many a dowager has "marked" George Geith as a desirable match for one of her numerous brood, should that woman ever die; but married or single, bound or free, the owner of Snareham Castle will never look with a smile of love on the face of woman again.



He has no heart now ; it is lying with Beryl in the vaults of Snareham Church ; and he could relinquish all his wealth, he could go through all the old drudgery again, he would descend the ladder of worldly success and worldly ambition to its lowest rung, if he could bring back again the days when, with a hopeful spirit and a thankful heart, he walked hand-in-hand with Beryl, when he was neither city magnate nor country squire, but only hard-working, self-reliant George Geith of Fen Court.

THE END.



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