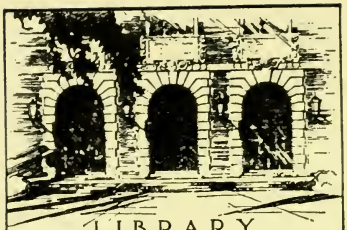

THE FORLORN HOPE.

A Novel.

BY

EDMUND YATES,

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18 CATHERINE ST., STRAND.
1867.

LONDON:
ROBSON AND SON, GREAT NORTHERN PRINTING WORKS,
PANCRAS ROAD, N.W.

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THE FORLORN HOPE.

CHAPTER I.

A TURN OF THE SCREW.

Chudleigh Wilmot had not seen Mrs. Prendergast since the day on which his wife's funeral had taken place; and it was with equal surprise and satisfaction that she received a brief but kindly-worded note from him, requesting her to permit him to call upon her.

"I wonder what it's all about," she thought, as she wrote with deliberation and care a gracious answer in the affirmative. Mrs. Prendergast had been thinking too since her friend's death, and her cogitations had had some practical results. It was true that Mabel Darlington had not been happy with Wilmot; but Mrs. Prendergast, thinking it all over, was not indisposed to the opinion that it was a good deal her own fault, and to enter-

tain the very natural feminine conviction that things would have been quite otherwise had she been in Mabel's place. Why should she not—of course in due time, and with a proper observance of all the social decencies—hope to fill that place now? She was a practical, not a sentimental woman; but when the idea occurred to her very strongly, she certainly did find pleasure in remembering that Mabel Wilmot had been very much attached to her, and would perhaps have liked the notion of her being her successor as well as any woman ever really likes any suggestion of the kind, that is to say, resignedly, and with an "it-might-be-worse" reservation.

Henrietta Prendergast had cherished a very sound dislike to Chudleigh Wilmot for some time; but it was, though quite real—while the fact that he had chosen another than herself, though she had been so ready and willing to be chosen, was constantly impressed upon her remembrance—not of a lasting nature. Besides, she had had the satisfaction of making him understand very distinctly that the choice he had made had not been a

wise one; and ever since her feelings towards him had been undergoing a considerable modification.

How much ground had Mabel had for her jealousy of Miss Kilsyth? What truth was there in the suspicions they had both entertained respecting the influence which his young patient had exercised over Wilmot? She had no means of determining these questions. It would have been impossible for her, had she been a woman capable of such a meanness, to have watched Wilmot during the interval which had elapsed since his wife's death. His numerous professional duties, the constant demands upon his time, all rendered her attaining any distinct knowledge of his proceedings impossible; and beyond the announcement in the *Morning Post* that Kilsyth of Kilsyth and his family had arrived in town, she knew nothing whatever concerning them. Henrietta Prendergast had, on the whole, been considerably occupied with the idea of Chudleigh Wilmot when his note reached her, and she prepared to receive him with feelings which resembled those of long-past days rather than those which had actuated her of late.

It was late in the afternoon when the expected visitor made his appearance, and Henrietta had already begun to feel piqued and angry at the delay. His note indicated a pressing wish to see her—she had answered it promptly. What had made him so dilatory about availing himself of her permission ?

The first look she caught of Wilmot's face convinced her that the motive of his visit was a grave one. He was pale and sedate, even to a fixed seriousness far beyond that which had fallen upon him after the shock of Mabel's death, and a painful devouring anxiety might be read in the troubled haggard expression of his deep-set dark eyes. He entered at once upon the matter which had induced him to ask Mrs. Prendergast for an interview; and though her manner was emphatically gracious, and designed to show him that she desired to maintain their former relations intact, he took no notice of her courtesy. This was a mistake. All women are quick to take cognisance of a slight, and Henrietta was no slower than the rest of her sex. He showed her much too plainly that he had an object

in seeking her presence entirely unconnected with herself. It was not wise; but the shock of the discovery which he had made had shaken Wilmot's nerves and overthrown his judgment for the time. He briefly informed Mrs. Prendergast that he came for the purpose of asking her to recapitulate all the circumstances of his wife's illness and death; to entreat her to tax her memory to the utmost, to recall everything, however trivial, bearing upon the progress of the malady, and in particular every detail bearing upon her state of mind.

Henrietta listened to him with profound astonishment. Previously he had shunned all such details. When she had met him, prepared to supply them, he had asked her no questions; he had been apparently satisfied with the medical report made to him by Dr. Whittaker; he had been almost indifferent to such minor facts as she had stated; and the painful revelation which she had made to him had not been followed up by any close questioning on his part. And now, when all was at an end, when the grave had closed over the sad domestic story, as over all the tragedies of human

life, hidden or displayed, the grave must close,—now he came to her with this preoccupied brooding face and manner to ask her these vain and painful questions. Thus she was newly associated with dark and dismal images in his mind, and this was precisely what Henrietta had no desire to be. She answered him, therefore, in her coldest tone (and no woman knew how to ice her answers better than she did), that the subject was extremely painful to her for many reasons. Was it absolutely necessary to revive it? Wilmot said it was, and expressed no consideration for her feelings nor regret for the necessity of wounding them.

"Well, then, Dr. Wilmot," said Henrietta, "as I presume you wish to question me in some particular direction, though I am quite at a loss to understand why, you are at liberty to do so."

Wilmot then commenced an interrogatory, which, as it proceeded, filled Henrietta with amazement. Had he any theory of his wife's illness and death incompatible with the facts as she had seen and understood them? Did he suspect Dr. Whittaker of ignorance and mismanage-

ment in the case? Even supposing he did, what would it avail him now to convince himself that such suspicion was well founded? All was inevitable, all was irreparable now. While these thoughts were busy in her brain, she was answering question after question put to her by Wilmot in a cold voice, and with her steady neutral-tinted eyes fixed in pitiless scrutiny upon him. He asked her in particular about the period at which Mabel had suppressed Dr. Whittaker's letter to him. Had she been particularly unhappy just then; had the "unfortunate notion she had conceived about—about Miss Kilsyth, been in her mind before, or just at that time?"

This question Mrs. Prendergast could not, or would not, answer very distinctly. She did not remember exactly when Mabel had heard so much about Miss Kilsyth; she did not know what day it was on which Dr. Whittaker had written. Wilmot produced the letter, and pointed out the date. Still Mrs. Prendergast's memory refused to aid her reliably. She really did not know; she could not answer this. Could she remember whether Mabel

had ever left her room after that letter had been written? or whether she had been confined to her room when she had received his (Wilmot's) letter from Kilsyth; the letter which Mrs. Prendergast had said had distressed her so much, had brought about the confidence between Mabel and herself relative to the feelings of the former, and had led Mabel to say that she had no desire to live? Wilmot awaited the reply to these questions in a state of suspense not far removed from agony. He could not indeed permit himself to cherish a hope that the dreadful idea he entertained was unfounded; but in the answer awful confirmation or the germ of hope must lie.

Henrietta replied, after a few moments' thoughtful silence. She could remember the circumstances, though not the precise date. Mabel had left her room on the day on which she had received Wilmot's letter; she had been in the drawing-rooms, and even in the consulting-room on that day. It was on the night that she had told Mrs. Prendergast all, and had expressed her desire to die, her conviction that she could not recover. Henrietta

was not certain whether that day was the same as that on which Dr. Whittaker's letter was written, but she was perfectly clear on the point on which Wilmot appeared to lay so much stress; she knew it was the day after his last letter from Kilsyth had reached her.

The intense suffering displayed in every line of Wilmot's face as she made this statement touched Henrietta as much as it puzzled her. Had she mistaken this man? Had he really deep feelings, strong susceptibilities? Had the shock of his wife's death been far otherwise felt than she had believed, and was he now groping after every detail, in order to feed the vain flame of love and memory? Such a supposition accorded very ill with all she knew and all she imagined of Chudleigh Wilmot; but she could find no other within her not infertile brain.

"What became of my letter to her?" Wilmot asked her abruptly.

"It is in her coffin, together with every other you ever wrote her. I placed them there at her own request. She had them tied up in a packet,

—the others I mean; but she gave me that one separately."

"Why?" asked Wilmot in a hoarse whisper.

"Why!" repeated Henrietta. "I don't know. It was only a few hours before she died. She hardly spoke at all after, but she told me quite distinctly then that I was to give you her wedding-ring, and to place those letters in her coffin. 'I could not destroy those,' she said, touching the packet in my hand; 'and this,' she drew it from under her pillow as she spoke, 'I want to be placed with me too. It is my justification.'"

"My justification!" repeated Wilmot. "What did she mean? What did you understand that she meant by that?"

"I did not think much about it. The poor thing was near her end then, and I thought little of it; though of course I did what she desired."

"Yes, yes, I understand," said Wilmot. "But her justification—justification in what—for what?"

"In her gloomy and miserable ideas of course, and, above all, in her desire to die. She believed that your letter contained the proof of all she

feared and suffered from, and so justified her longing to escape from further neglect and sorrow."

"You did not suspect that it had any further meaning?"

Henrietta stared at him in silence.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "my mind is confused by anxiety. I am afraid, Mrs. Prendergast, there may have been features in this case not rightly understood. Could it be that Whittaker was deceived?"

"I think not—I cannot believe that there was any error. Dr. Whittaker never expressed any anxiety on *that* point, any uncertainty, any wish to divide the responsibility, except with yourself. I understood him to say that he had gone into the case very fully with you, and that you were satisfied everything had been done within the resources of medicine."

"Yes, he did. I don't blame him; I don't blame anyone but myself. But, Mrs. Prendergast, that is not the point. What I want to get at is this: did she—my wife I mean—did she hide anything from Whittaker's knowledge?"

"Anything? In her physical state do you mean? Of her mental sufferings no one but myself ever had the smallest indication. Will you wrong her dead as well as living?" said Henrietta angrily.

"No," he answered, "I will not,—I trust I will not, and do not. I meant, did she tell Whittaker all about her illness? Did she conceal any symptoms from him? Did she suffer more or otherwise than he knew of?"

"Frankly, I think she did, Dr. Wilmot. She was extremely, almost painfully patient; I would much rather have seen her less so. She answered his questions and mine, but she said nothing except in answer to questioning. She suffered, I am convinced, infinitely more than she allowed to appear; and especially on the night of her death, just before the stupor set in, she was in great agony."

"Yes," said Wilmot hurriedly. "Was Whittaker there? Did he know it?"

"He was not there; he had been sent for a little while before, when she was tranquil; and

she was quite insensible when he returned in about three hours. He told you, of course, that we had had good hope of her during the day,—in fact, up to the evening?"

"Yes, he said there had been a rally, but it had not lasted. Did she know that there was hope?"

"She did," said Henrietta slowly and reluctantly. "You ask me very painful questions, Dr. Wilmot,—painful to me in the extreme; and I am sure my answers must be acutely distressing to you. I cannot understand your motive."

"No," he said, "I am sure you cannot; neither can I explain it. But indeed I am compelled to put these questions; I cannot spare either you or myself. You say she knew there was hope of her recovery on the day before her death; and yet while the rally lasted,—before the suffering of which you speak set in,—she gave you those solemn charges which you fulfilled?"

"Yes," said Henrietta—and her voice was soft now and her eyes were full of tears—"she

did. She did not trust the rally. She told me, with such a dreadful smile, that it would not avail to keep her from her rest. She was right. From the moment she grew worse the progress of death was awfully rapid."

"What medicine did you give her during the brief improvement?"

"Only some restorative drops. Dr. Whittaker gave them to her himself several times, and when he left I gave them to her."

"Did she ever take this medicine of her own accord? Was she strong enough in the interval of improvement to take medicine, or to move without assistance?"

Again Henrietta looked at him for a little while before she replied:

"If you are afraid, Dr. Wilmot, that any mistake was made about the medicine, dismiss such a fear. There was no other medicine in the room but the bottle containing the drops; and now your strange question reminds me that she did take them once unassisted."

Wilmot rose and came towards her.

"How? when?" he said eagerly. "How could she do so in her weak state?"

"The bottle was on the table, close by her bed. Only one dose was left. She had asked me to raise the window-blind; and I was doing so, when she stretched out her arm and took the bottle off the table. When I turned round she was drinking the last drops, and the next moment she dropped the bottle on the floor, and it was broken."

"Was she fainting, then?"

"O no," said Henrietta, "she was quite sensible, until the pain came on. Indeed I remember that she told me to keep away from the bed until the broken glass had been swept up."

"Was that done?"

"Yes, I did it myself at once."

"One more question, Mrs. Prendergast," said Wilmot, who had put a strong constraint upon himself, and spoke calmly now. "When did she charge you to have her coffin closed within two days of her death? Was it within the interval during which her recovery seemed possible?"

"It was," answered Henrietta,—"it was when

she told me that the rally was deceitful, and was not to keep her from her rest. Then I undertook to carry out her wish."

"Did she give any reason for having formed it?"

"She did—the reason you surmised when I first told you of it. I need not repeat it."

"I would wish you to do so—pray let me hear the exact words she said."

"Well, then, they were these. 'You will promise me to see it done, Henrietta. He cannot get home, even supposing he could leave at once, when he hears that I am dead, until late on the second day.' I told her it was an awful thing that she should wish you not to see her again, and she said, 'No, no, it is not. If he thinks of my face at all, I want him to see it in his memory as it was when I thought he liked to look at it. I could not bear him to remember it black and disfigured.' Those were her exact words, Dr. Wilmot; and like all the rest she said, they proved to me how much she loved you."

Wilmot made no answer, and neither spoke for

some minutes. Then Wilmot extended his hand, which Henrietta took with some cordiality, and said, "I thank you very much, Mrs. Prendergast, for the patience with which you have heard me and answered me. I have no explanation to give you. I shall never forget your kindness to my wife, and I hope we shall always be good friends."

He pressed her hand warmly as he spoke; and before Henrietta could reply, he left her to cogitations as vain and unsatisfactory as they were absorbing and unceasing.

Chudleigh Wilmot went direct to his own house after his interview with Henrietta, and gave himself up to the emotions which possessed him. Not a shadow of doubt did he now entertain that his wife had destroyed herself. In the skill and ingenuity with which he invested the act, in his active fancy, which had read the story from the unconscious narrative of Henrietta, he recognised a touch of insanity, which his experience taught him was not very rare in cases similar to that of his wife. To a certain extent he was relieved by the conviction that when she had done the irrevo-

cable deed she was not in her right mind. But what had led to it? what had been the predisposing causes? His conscience, awakened too late, his heart, softened too late, gave him a stern and searching answer. Her life had been unhappy, and she had made her escape from it. He was as much to blame as if he had voluntarily and actively made her wretched. He saw this now by the light of that keener susceptibility, that higher understanding, which had been kindled within him. It had been kindled by the magic touch of love. Another woman had made him see into his wife's heart, and understand her life. What was he to do now? how was it to be with him in the future? He hardly dared to think. Sometimes his mind dwelt on the possibility that it might not be as he believed it was, and the only means of resolving his doubts suggested itself. He might have Mabel's body exhumed, and then the truth would be known. But he shrank with horror from the thought, as from a dishonour to her memory. If he took such a step, it must be accounted for; and could he, would he dare to cast

such a slur upon the woman who, if she had done this deed, had resorted to it because, as his wife, she was miserable? Had he any right, supposing it was all a dreadful delusion that she had meddled with his poisons for some trivial motive, however inexplicable,—had he any right to solve his own doubts at such a price as their exposure to cold official eyes? No—a resolute negative was the reply of his heart to these questions; and he made up his mind that his punishment must be lifelong irremediable doubt, to be borne with such courage as he could summon, but never to be escaped from or left behind.

Utter sickness of heart fell upon him and a great weariness. From the past he turned away with vain terrible regret; to the future he dared not look. The present he loathed. He must leave that house, he thought impatiently—he could not bear the sight of it. It had none of the dear and sorrowful sacredness which makes one cling to the home of the loved and lost; it was hateful to him; for there the life his indifference, his want of comprehension had blighted, had been terminated

—he shuddered as he thought by what means. And then he thought he would leave England; he could not see Madeleine Kilsyth again; or if he had to do so, he could not see her often. To think of her, in her innocent youth and beauty, as one to be loved, or wooed, or won—if even in his most distant dreams such a possibility were approached by a man whose life had such a story in it, such a dreadful truth, setting him apart from other men —was almost sacrilegious. No, he would go away. Fate had dealt him a tremendous blow; he could not stand against it; he must yield to it for the present, at all events. Under the influence of the terrible truth which he was forced to confront, all his ambition, all his energy seemed suddenly to have deserted the rising man.

* * * * *

"But, my dear fellow, I can't bring myself to believe that you are serious; I can't indeed, just as the ball is at your foot too. I protest I expected you to distance them all in another year. Everybody talks of you; and what is infinitely better, everyone is ready to call you in if they require

your services, or fancy they require them. Why, there's Kilsyth of Kilsyth—ah, Wilmot, you threw me over in that direction, but I don't bear malice —he swears by you. The fine old fellow came to the bank yesterday; I met him in the hall, and he got into my brougham, and came home with me, for no other reason on earth than to talk about you. Wilmot's skill and Wilmot's coolness, Wilmot's kindness and Wilmot's care — nothing but Wilmot. I should have been bored to death by so much talking all about one man, if it had been any man but yourself. And now to tell me that you are going away, going to make a gap in your life, going to give up the running, and forfeit such prospects as yours—because you must remember, my dear fellow, you must not calculate on resuming exactly where you have left off, in any sort of game of life; to do such a thing as this because you have met with a loss which thousands of men have to bear, and work on just as usual notwithstanding! Impossible, my dear Wilmot; you are not in earnest—you have not considered the thing!"

Thus emphatically spoke Mr. Foljambe to Chudleigh Wilmot, all the more emphatically because his friend's resolution had astonished as much as it had displeased and disquieted him. Mr. Foljambe had never looked upon Wilmot at all in the light of a particularly devoted husband; and when he alluded to the loss of a wife being one which he had to bear in common with many other sufferers, he had done so with a shrewd conviction that Wilmot must be trusted to find all the fortitude necessary for the occasion.

Mr. Foljambe, of Portland-place, was a very rich and influential banker; gouty enough to bear out the tradition of his wealth, and courteous and wise enough to do credit to his calling. He was not describable as a City man, however, but was, on the contrary, a pleasure and fashion-loving old gentleman, who was perfectly versed in the ways of society, *au courant* of all the gossip of "town," very popular in the gayest and in the most select circles, an authority upon horses, though he never rode, learned in wines, though he consumed them in great moderation, believed not to possess a rela-

tive in the world, and more attached to Chudleigh Wilmot than to any human being alive, at his present and advanced period of existence. The old gentleman and Chudleigh Wilmot's father had been chums in boyhood and friends in manhood; and the friendship he felt for the younger man was somewhat hereditary, though Wilmot's qualities were precisely of a nature to have won Mr. Foljambe's regard on their own merits. He had watched Wilmot's course with the utmost interest, pride, and pleasure. His unflagging industry, his determined energy commanded his sympathy; and he anticipated a triumphant career of professional success and renown for his favourite. The intelligence that he had determined, if not to relinquish, at least to suspend his professional labours, gave the kind old gentleman sincere concern. He did not understand it, he repeated over and over again; he could not make it out; it was not like Wilmot. Of course he could not say distinctly to him that he had never supposed his wife to be so dear to him that her death must needs revolutionise his life. But if he did not say this,

Wilmot discerned it in his manner; but still he offered no explanation. He could not remain in England; he must go. His health, his mind would give way, if he did not get away into another scene, into new associations. All remonstrance, all argument proved unavailing; and when Wilmot bade his old friend farewell, he left him half angry and half mistrustful, as well as altogether depressed and sorrowful.

CHAPTER II.

HIS GRATEFUL PATIENT.

She has destroyed herself! That was the key-note to all his thoughts. Destroyed herself, made away with herself! Destroyed herself! He was not much of a reading man—had not time for it in all his occupations; but what were those two lines which would keep surging up into his beating brain, and from time to time finding expression on his trembling tongue—

> "Rashly importunate,
> Gone to her death!"

Gone to her death! He repeated the words a thousand times. Dead now; gone to her last account, as Shakespeare says, "with all her imperfections on her head." Gone, without chance or power of recall; gone without a word of explanation between them, without a word of sympathy, without a word of forgiveness on either side. He

had often pictured their parting, he dying, she dying, and had imagined the scene; how, whichever of them found life ebbing away, would say that they had misunderstood the other perhaps, and that perhaps life might have been made more to each, had they been more suitable; but that they had been faithful, and so on; and perhaps hereafter they might, &c. He had thought of this often; but the end had come now, and his ideas had not been realised. There had been no parting, no mutual forgiveness, no last words of tenderness and hope. He had not been there to soothe her dying hour; to tell her how he acknowledged all her goodness, and how, though perhaps he had not made much outward manifestation, he had always thoroughly appreciated the discharge of her wifely duties to him. He had not been present to have one whispered explanation of how each had misunderstood the other, and how both had been in the wrong; to share in one common prayer for forgiveness, and one common hope of future meeting. There had been no explanation, no forgiveness; he had parted from her almost as he might from any every-

day acquaintance; he had written to her such a letter as he might have written to Whittaker, who had taken his practice temporarily; and now he returned to find her dead! Worse than dead! Dead probably by her own act, by her own hand!

Stay! He was losing his head now; his pulse was at fever-heat, his skin dry and hot. Why had this terrible supposition taken such fast hold upon him? There was the evidence of the ring and of the leaden seal. Certainly practical evidence; but the motive—where was the motive? Suppose now—and a horrible shudder ran through him as the supposition crossed his mind—suppose now that this had become a matter for legal inquiry? suppose—Heaven knows how—suppose that the servants had suspected, and had talked, and—and the law had interfered—what motive would have been put forward for Mabel's self-destruction? He and she had never had a word of contention since their marriage; no one could prove that there had ever been the smallest disagreement between them; her home had been such as befitted her station; no

word could be breathed against her husband's character; and yet—

> "Anywhere, anywhere,
> Out of the world!"

that was another couplet from the same poem that was fixed in his brain, and that he found himself constantly quoting, when he was trying to assign reasons for his wife's suicide. Was Henrietta Prendergast right, after all? Had his whole married life been a mistake, a Dead-Sea apple without even the gorgeous external, a hollow sham, a delusion, and a mockery culminating in the semblance of a crime? "Anywhere out of the world," eh? And "out of the world" had meant at first, in the early days, when the first faint dawnings of discontent rose in her mind,—then "anywhere out of the world" was a poor dejected cry of repining at her want of power to influence her husband, to make herself the successful rival of his profession, to wean him from the constant pursuit of science to the exclusion of all domestic bliss, and to render him her companion and her lover. But if Henrietta Prendergast were right, that must have been

a mere fancy, which, compared to the wild despair that prompted the heart-broken shriek of "anywhere out of the world" at the last, and which, according to that authority, meant—anywhere for rest and peace and quiet, anywhere where I may stifle the love which I bear him, may be no longer a fetter and a clog to him, and might have to suffer the knowledge that though bound to me, he loves Madeleine Kilsyth.

He loves Madeleine Kilsyth! As the thought rose in his mind, he found himself audibly repeating the sentence. His dead wife thought that; and in that thought found life insupportable to her, and destroyed herself! His dead wife! Straightway his thoughts flew back through a series of years, and he saw himself first married,—young, earnest, and striving. Not in love with his wife —that he never had been, he reflected with something like self-excuse—not in love with Mabel, but actually proud of her. When he first commenced his connection, and earned the gratitude of the great railway contractor's wife at Clapham, and that great dame, who was the ruling star in her

own circle, intimated her intention of calling on Mrs. Wilmot, Wilmot remembered how he had thanked his stars that while some of his fellow-students had married barmaids of London taverns, or awkward hoydens from their provincial pasture, he had had the good luck to espouse a girl than whom the great Mrs. Sleepers herself was not more thoroughly presentable, more perfectly well-mannered. He recollected the first interview at his little, modest, badly-furnished house, with the dingy maid-servant decorated with one of Mabel's cast-off gowns (not cast off until every scrap of bloom had been ruthlessly worn off it), and the arrival of the great lady in her banging, swinging barouche, with her tawdry ill-got-up footman, and her evident astonishment at the way in which everything was made the most of, and at the taste which characterised the rooms, and her open-mouthed wonder at Mabel herself, in her turned black-silk dress and her neat linen cuffs and collar, and her impossibility to patronise, and her declaration delivered to him the next day, that his wife was "the nicest little woman in the world, and a real lady!"

Out of the gloom of long-since vanished days came a thousand little reminiscences, each "garlanded with its peculiar flower," each touchingly remindful of something pleasant connected with the dead woman whom he had lost. Long dreary nights which he had passed in reading and working, and which she had spent in vaguely wondering what was to be the purport and result of all his labour. No sympathy! that had been his cry! Good God!—as though he had not been demented in fancying that a young woman could have had sympathy with his dry studies, his physiological experiments. No sympathy! what sympathy had he shown to her? The mere physical struggle in the race, the hope of winning, the dawning of success, had irradiated his life, had softened the stony path, and pushed aside the briers, and tempered the difficulties in his career; but how had she benefited? In sharing them? But had he permitted her to share them? had he ever made her a portion of himself? had he not laughed aside the notion of her entering into the vital affairs of his career, and told her that any

assistance from her was an impossibility? That she was self-contained and unsympathetic, he had said to himself a thousand times. Now, for the first time, he asked himself who had made her so;—and the answer was anything but consoling to him in his then desolate frame of mind.

These thoughts were constantly present to him; he found it impossible to shake them off; in the few minutes' interval between the exit of one patient and the entrance of another, in his driving from house to house, his mind instantly gave up the case with which it had recently been occupied, and turned back to the dead woman. He would sit, apparently looking vacantly before him, but in reality trying to recall the looks, words, ways of his dead wife. He tried—O, how hard!—to recall one look of content, of happiness, of thorough trust and love; but he tried in vain. A general expression of quiet suffering, which had become calm through continuance, varied by an occasional glance of querulous impatience when he might have been betrayed into dilating on the importance of some case in which he happened to be engaged

and the interest with which it filled him,—these were his only recollections of Mabel's looks. Nor did his remembrance of her words and ways afford him any more comfort. True she had never said, certainly had never said to him, that her life was anything but a happy one; but she had looked it often. Even he felt that now, reading her looks by the light of memory, and wondered that the truth had never struck him at the time. He remembered how he would look up off his work and see her, her hands lying listlessly in her lap, her eyes staring vacantly before, so entranced, so rapt in her own thoughts, that she would start violently when he spoke to her. She always had the same answer for his questions at those times. What was the matter with her? Nothing! What should be the matter with her?—What was she thinking of? Nothing, at least nothing that could possibly interest him. Did her presence there annoy him, because she would go away willingly if it did? And the voice in which this was said—the cold, hard, dry, unsympathising voice! Good God! if he had not been sufficiently mindful of

her, if he had not bestowed such attention and affection as is due from a husband to his wife, surely there was some small excuse for him in the manner in which his clumsy approaches had been received!

At times he felt a wild inexplicable desire to have her back again with him, and fell into a long train of thought as to what he should do supposing all the events of the past three months were to turn out to have been a dream—as indeed he often fancied they would; and on his return he were to go up into the drawing-room, whither he had never penetrated since his return, and were to find Mabel sitting there, prim and orderly, among the prim and orderly furniture. Should he alter his method of life, and endeavour to make it more acceptable to her? How was it to be done? It would be impossible for him now to give up his confirmed ways; impossible for him to give up his reading and his work, and fritter away his evenings in taking his wife to the gaieties to which they were invited. Perkins might do that—did it, and found it answer; but

the profession knew that Perkins was a charlatan, and he— What wild nonsense was he thinking of! It was done—it was over; he should never find his wife waiting for him again when he returned: she was dead; she had destroyed herself!

As this horrible thought burst upon him again with tenfold its original horror, he buried his face in his hands, and bowed his head upon the writing-table in front of him in an agony of despair. He could bear it no longer; it was driving him mad. If he only knew—and yet he dared not inquire more closely; the presumptive evidence was horribly strong, was thoroughly sufficient to rob him of his peace of mind, of his clearness of intellect. Then the terrible consequences of the discovery, the awful duty which it imposed upon him, flashed upon his labouring consciousness. He dared not inquire more closely? No, not he. As a physician, he knew perfectly well what the result of any such inquiry would be. He knew perfectly well that in any other case, where he was merely professionally and not personally interested, his first idea for the solution

of such doubts as then oppressed him, had they existed in anyone else, would have been to suggest the exhumation of the body, and its rigid examination. He knew perfectly well that, harbouring such doubts as were then racking and torturing his distracted mind, it was clearly his duty to insist on such steps being taken. He was no squeamish woman, no nervous man, to be alarmed at the sight of death's dread handiwork; that was familiar to him from constant experience, from old hospital custom, from his education and his studies. Should this dread idea of Mabel's self-destruction, now ever haunting him, ever present to his mind—should it cross the thoughts of anyone else, would not the necessity for exhumation be the first notion that would present itself? Suppose he were to suggest it? Suppose he were to profess himself dissatisfied with the accounts of Mabel's illness given him by Whittaker, and were to insist upon positive proof, professionally satisfactory to him, of his wife's disease? Of course he would make a deadly enemy of Whittaker; but that he thought but little of:

his name stood high enough to bear any slur that might be thrown upon it from that quarter, and his reputation would stand higher than ever from the mere fact of his boldly determining to face a disagreeable inquiry, rather than allow such a case to be slurred over. And the inquiry made, and Whittaker's statement proved to be generally correct, at best it would be thought that Dr. Wilmot was somewhat morbidly anxious as to the cause of his wife's death; an anxiety which would be anything but prejudicial to him in the minds of many of his friends, while the relief to his own overcharged mind would be immediate and complete. Relief! Ah, once more to feel relief would be worth all the responsibility. He would see about it at once; he would give the necessary information, and — But suppose the result did not turn out as he would hope to see it? suppose all the information given, the coroner's warrant obtained, the exhumation made, the examination complete, and the result—that Mabel had destroyed herself? The first step taken in such a matter would be an immediate challenge to public attention; the

press would bear the whole matter broadcast on its wings; Dr. Wilmot and his domestic affairs would become a subject for gossip throughout the land; and if it proved that Mabel had destroyed herself, her memory would, at his instance, remain ever crime-tainted. Even if the best happened; if Whittaker's judgment were indorsed, would not people ask whether it was not odd that a suspicion of foul play should have crossed the husband's mind, whether Mrs. Wilmot in her lifetime may not have used such a threat; and if so, might not the circumstances which led to the supposed use of the threat be inquired into, the motives questioned, the home-life discussed? Hour after hour he revolved this in his mind, purposeless, wavering. Finally he decided that he would leave matters as they were, saying to himself that such a course was merely justice to his dead wife, on whose memory, were she guilty of self-slaughter, he should be the last to bring obloquy, or even suspicion. He felt more comfortable after having come to this decision—more comfortable in persuading himself that he was

guided by a tender feeling towards the dead woman. He said "Poor Mabel!" to himself several times in thinking over it, and shook his head dolefully; and actually felt that if she had been prompted by his neglect to take this step, his omitting to call public attention to it was in itself some *amende* for his neglect. But even to himself he would not allow this soul-guiding influence in the matter. He blinked it, and shut his eyes to it; refused to listen to it, and—was led by it all the same. Chudleigh Wilmot tried to persuade himself, did persuade himself that he was acting solely in deference to his dead wife's memory; but what really influenced his conduct was the knowledge that the arousal of the smallest suspicion as to the cause of his wife's death, the smallest scandal about himself, would inevitably separate him hopelessly, and for ever, from Madeleine Kilsyth. The great question as to whether Mabel had destroyed herself still remained unanswered. He was powerless to shake off the impression, and under the impression he was useless; he could do justice neither to himself

nor his patients. He must get away; give up practice at least for a time, and go abroad; go somewhere where he knew no one, and where he himself was quite unknown—somewhere where he could have rest and quiet and surcease of brain-work; where he could face this dreadful incubus, and either get rid of it, or school himself to bear it without its present dire effect on his life.

He would do that, and do it at once. The death of his wife would afford him sufficient excuse to the world, which knew him as a highly nervous and easily impressible man, and which would readily understand that he had been shattered by the suddenness of the blow. As to his practice, he was well content to give that up for a short time: he knew his own value without being in the least conceited—knew that he could pick it up again just where he left it, and that his patients would be only too glad to see him. He had felt that when he was at Kilsyth.

At Kilsyth! The word jarred upon him at once. To give up his practice even for a time meant a temporary estrangement from Madeleine;

meant a shutting out, so far as he was concerned, of sun and warmth and light and life, at the very time when his way was darkest and his path most beset. His mind had been so fully occupied since his return, that he had only been able to give a few fleeting thoughts to Madeleine. He felt a kind of horror at permitting her even in his thoughts to be connected with the dreadful subject which filled them. But now when the question of departure was being considered by him, he naturally turned to Madeleine.

To leave London now would be to throw away for ever his chance with Madeleine Kilsyth. His chance with her? Yes, his chance of winning her! He was a free man now—free to take his place among her suitors, and try his chance of winning her for himself. How wonderful that seemed to him, to be unfettered, to be free to woo where he liked! Last time he had drifted into marriage carelessly and without purpose—it should be very different the next time. But to leave London now would be throwing away for ever his chance with Madeleine. He knew that; he knew that he

had established a claim of gratitude on the family, which Kilsyth himself, at all events, would gladly allow, and which Lady Muriel would probably not be prepared to deny. As for Madeleine herself, he knew that she was deeply grateful to him, and thoroughly disposed to confide in him. This was all he had dared to hope hitherto; but now he was in a position to try and awaken a warmer feeling. Gratitude was not a bad basis to begin on, and he hoped, he did not know it was so long since the days of Maria Strutt—and thinking it over, he looked blankly in the glass at the crows'-feet round his eyes and the streaks of silver in his dark hair; but he thought then that he had the art of pleasing women, unfortunate as was the result of that particular case. But if he were to go away, the advantageous position he had so luckily gained would be lost, the ground would be cut away from under his feet, and on his return he would have great difficulty in being received on a footing of intimacy by the family; while it would probably be impossible for him to regain the confidence and esteem he then enjoyed from all of them.

Was, then, Madeleine Kilsyth a necessary ingredient in his future happiness? That was a new subject for consideration. Hitherto, while that—that barrier existed, he had looked upon the whole affair merely as a strange sort of romance, in which ideas and feelings of which he had never had much experience, and that experience long ago, had suddenly revived within him. Pleasantly enough; for it was pleasant to know that his heart had not yet been enough trodden down and hardened by the years which had gone over it to prevent it receiving seed and bearing fruit;—pleasantly enough; for an exchange of the stern reality of his work, a dry world with the bevy of cares which are ready waiting for you as you emerge from your morning's tub, and which only disappear—to change into nightmares—as you extinguish your bedroom gas—an exchange of this for a little of that glamour of love which he thought never to meet with again, could not fail to be pleasant. But the affair was altered now; the occurrence which had made him free had at the same time rendered it necessary that he should use his freedom to a cer-

tain end. Under former circumstances he could have been frequently in Madeleine's company,—happy as he never had been save when with her,—and the world would have asked no question, have lifted no eyebrow, have shrugged no shoulder. Dr. Wilmot was a married man, and his professional position warranted his visiting Miss Kilsyth, who was his patient, as often as he thought necessary. But now it was a very different matter. Here was a man, still young, at least quite young enough to marry again; and if it were said, as it would be, that he was "constantly at the house," people—those confounded anonymous persons, the *on* who do such an enormous amount of mischief in the world—would begin to talk and whisper and hint; and the girl's name might be compromised through him, and that would never do.

Did he love her? did he want to marry her? As he asked himself the question, his thoughts wandered back to Kilsyth. He saw her lying flushed and fevered, her long golden hair tossing over her pillow, a bright light in her blue eyes, her hot hands clasped behind her burning head—

or, better still, in her convalescence, when she lay still and tranquil, and looked up at him timidly and softly, and thanked him in the fullest and most liquid tones for all his kindness to her. And he remembered how, gazing at her, listening to her, the remembrance of what Love really was had come to him out of the far-away regions of the Past, and had moved his heart within him in the same manner, but much more potently than it had been moved in the days of his youth. Yes; the question that he had put to himself admitted but of one answer. He did love Madeleine Kilsyth; he did want to marry her! To that end he would employ all his energies; to secure that he would defer everything. What nonsense had he been talking about giving up his practice and going away? He would remain where he was, and marry Madeleine!

And Henrietta Prendergast? The thought of that woman struck him like a whip. If he were to marry Madeleine Kilsyth, would not that woman, Henrietta Prendergast, Mabel's intimate and only friend—would not she proclaim to the world all

that she knew of the jealousy in which the dead woman held the young girl? Would not his marriage be a confirmation of her story? Might it not be possible that the existence of such a talk might create other talk; that the manner of her death might be discussed; that it might be suspected that, driven to it by jealousy—that is how they would put it—Mrs. Wilmot had destroyed herself? And if "they" put it so, it would be in vain to deny it. The mere fact of his having been successful in his profession had created hosts of enemies, who would take advantage of the first adverse wind, and do their best to blast his renown and bring him down from the pedestal to which he had been elevated. Then bit by bit the scandal would grow—would permeate his practice —would become general town-talk. He would see the whispers and the shoulder-shrugs and the uplifted eyebrows, and perhaps the cool manner or the possible cut. Could he stand that? Could a man of his sensibility endure such talk? could he bear to feel that his domesticity was being laid bare before the world for the comment of each

idler who might choose to wile away his time in discussing the story? Impossible! No; sooner keep in his present dreary, hopeless, isolated position, sooner give up all chances of winning Madeleine, sooner even retrograde. He had no children to provide for, and could always have enough to support him in a sufficient manner. He would give it all up; he would go away; he would banish for ever that day-dream which he had permitted himself to enjoy, and he would——

A letter was brought in by his servant—an oblong note, sealed with black wax, in an unfamiliar handwriting. He turned it over two or three times, then opened it, and read as follows:

"*Brook-street, Thursday.*

"Dear Dr. Wilmot,—We have heard with very great regret of your sad loss, and we all, Lady Muriel, papa, and myself, beg you to receive our sincere condolence. I know how difficult it is at such a time to attempt to offer consolation without an appearance of intrusion; but I think I may say that we are especially concerned for you, as it

was your attendance on me which kept you from returning home at the time you had originally intended. I can assure you I have thought of this very often, and it has given me a great deal of uneasiness. Pray understand that we can none of us ever thank you sufficiently for your kindness to us at Kilsyth. With united kind regards, dear Dr. Wilmot, your grateful patient,

"MADELEINE KILSYTH.

"P.S. I have a rather troublesome cough, which worries me at night. You recollect telling me that you knew about this?"

So the Kilsyths were in town. His grateful patient! He could fancy the half-smile on her lips as she traced the words. No; he would give up his notion of going away—at least for the present!

CHAPTER III.

FAMILY RELATIONS.

When the Kilsyths were in London, which, according to their general practice, was only from February until June, they lived in a big square house in Brook-street,—an old-fashioned house, with a multiplicity of rooms, necessary for their establishment, which demanded besides the ordinary number of what were known in the house-agent's catalogue as "reception rooms," a sitting-room for Kilsyth, where he could be quiet and uninterrupted by visitors, and read the *Times*, and Scrope's *Salmon Fishing*, and Colonel Hawker on *Shooting*, and *Cyril Thornton*, and Gleig's *Subaltern*, and Napier's *History of the Peninsular War*, and one or two other books which formed his library; where he could smoke his cigar, and pass in review his guns and his gaiters and his

waterproofs, and hold colloquy with his man, Sandy MacCollop, as to what sport they had had the past year, and what they expected to have the next—without fear of interruption. This sanctuary of Kilsyth's lay far at the back of the house, at the end of a passage never penetrated by ordinary visitors, who indeed never inquired for the master of the house. Special guests were admitted there occasionally; and perhaps two or three times in the season there was a council-fire, to which some of the keenest sportsmen, who knew Kilsyth, and were about to visit it in the autumn, were admitted,—round which the smoke hung thick, and the conversation generally ran in monosyllables.

Lady Muriel's boudoir—another of the extraneous rooms which the house-agent's catalogue wotteth not of—led off the principal staircase through a narrow passage; and, so far as extravagance and good taste could combine in luxury, was the room of the house. When you are not an appraiser's apprentice, it is difficult to describe a room of this kind; it is best perhaps to

follow little Lord Towcester's description, who, when the subject was being discussed at mess, offered to back Lady Muriel's room for good taste against any in London; and when asked to describe it, said,

"Lots of flowers; lots of cushions; lots of soft things to sit down upon, and nice things to smell; and jolly books—to look at, don't you know: needn't say I haven't read any of 'em; and forty hundred clocks, with charming chimin' bells; and china monkeys, you know; and fellows with women's heads and no bodies, and that kind of thing; and those round tables, that are always sticking out their confounded third leg and tripping a fellow up. Most charmin' place, give you my word."

Lord Towcester's description was not a bad one, though to the initiated in his peculiar phraseology it scarcely did justice to the room, which was in rose-coloured silk and walnut-wood; which had *étagères*, and what-nots, and all the frivolousness of upholstery, covered with all the most expensive and useless china; which opened into a

little conservatory, always full of sweet-smelling plants, and where a little fountain played, and little gold-fish swam, and the gas-jets were cunningly hidden behind swinging baskets on pendent branches. There was a lovely little desk in one corner of the room, with a paper-stand on it always full of note-paper and envelopes radiant with Lady Muriel's cipher and monogram worked in all kinds of expensive ways, and with a series of drawers, which were full of letters and sketches and albums, and were always innocently open to everybody; and one drawer, which was not open to everybody, — which was closed indeed by a patent Bramah lock, and which, had it been inspected, would have been found to contain a lock of Stewart Caird's hair (cut from his head after death), a packet of letters from him of the most trivial character, and a copy of Owen Meredith's *Wanderer*, which Lady Muriel had been reading at the time of her first and only passion, and in which all the passages that she considered were applicable to or bearing on her own situation were thickly pencil-scored. But it

never was inspected, that drawer, and was understood by any who had ever had the hardihood to inquire about it, to contain household accounts. Lady Muriel Kilsyth in connection with a lock of a dead man's hair, a bundle of a dead man's letters, a pencil-marked copy of a sentimental poet! The idea was too absurd. Ah, how extraordinarily wise the world is, and in what a wonderful manner our power of reading character has developed!

Madeleine's rooms—by her stepmother's grace she had two, a sitting-room and a bedroom—are upstairs. Small rooms, but very pretty, and arranged with all the simple taste of a well-bred, right-thinking girl. Her hanging book-shelves are well filled with their row of poets, their row of "useful" works, their *Thomas à Kempis*, their Longfellow's *Hyperion*, their *Pilgrim's Progress*, their *Scenes of Clerical Life*—with all the Amos Barton bits dreadfully underscored—their *Christmas Carol*, and their *Esmond*. The neat little writing-table, with its gilt mortar inkstand, and its pretty costly nicknacks—birthday presents from

her fond father—stood in the window; and above it hung the cage of her pet canary. There were but few pictures on the walls: a water-colour drawing of Kilsyth, bad enough, with impossible perspective, and a very coppery sunset over very spotty blue hills, but dear to the girl as the work of the mother whom she had scarcely known; a portrait of her father in his youth, showing how gently time had dealt with the brave old boy; a print from Grant's portrait of Lady Muriel; and a photograph of Ronald in his uniform, looking very grim and stern and Puritan-like. There is a small cottage-piano too, and a well-filled music-stand,—well-filled, that is to say, according to its owner's ideas, but calculated to fill the souls of musical enthusiasts with horror or pity; for there is very little of the severe and the classical about Madeleine even in her musical tastes: Glück's *Orfeo*, some of Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Wörte*, and a few selections from Mozart, quite satisfied her; and the rest of the music-stand was filled with Bellini, Donizetti, Rossini, and Verdi, English ballads, and

even dance music. Upon all the room was the impress and evidence of womanly taste and neatness; nothing was prim, but everything was properly arranged; above all, neither in books, pictures, music, nor on the dressing-table or in the wardrobe in the bedroom, was there the smallest sign of fastness or slanginess, that almost omnipresent drawback to the charms of the young ladies of the present day.

Nigh to Madeleine's rooms was a big airy chamber with a shower-bath, an iron bedstead, a painted chest of drawers, and a couple of common chairs, for its sole furniture. This was the room devoted to Captain Kilsyth whenever he stayed with his relatives, and had been furnished according to his exact injunctions. It was like Roland himself, grim and stern, and was regarded as a kind of Blue Chamber of Horrors by Lady Muriel's little children, who used to hurry past its door, and accredited it as a perfect stronghold of bogies. This feeling was but a reflection of that with which the little girls Ethel and Maud regarded their elder brother. His visits to their schoolroom,

periodically made, were always looked forward to with intense fright both by them and by their governess Miss Blathers—a worthy woman, untouchable in Mangnall, devoted to the backboard, with a fair proficiency in music and French, but with an unconquerable tendency towards sentimentality of the most snivelling kind. Miss Blathers' sentiment was of the G. P. R. James's school; she was always on the look-out for that knight who was to come and deliver her from the bonds of governesshood, who was to fling his arm over her, as Count Gismond flung his round Mr. Browning's anonymous heroine, and lead her off to some land where Ollendorf was unknown, and Levizac had never been heard of. A thoroughly worthy creature, Miss Blathers, but horribly frightened of Ronald, who would come into the schoolroom, make his bow, pull his moustache, and go off at once into the questions, pulling his moustache a great deal more, and shrugging his shoulders at the answers he received.

It was not often, however, that Ronald came to Brook-street, at all events for any length of time.

When he was on duty, he was of course with his regiment in barracks; and when he had opportunities of devoting himself to his own peculiar studies and subjects, he generally took advantage of those opportunities with his own particular cronies. He would ride with Madeleine sometimes, in a morning, occasionally in the Row, but oftener for a long stretch round the pretty suburbs; and he would dine with his father now and then; and perhaps twice in the season would put in an appearance in Lady Muriel's opera-box, and once at a reception given by her. But, except perhaps by Madeleine, who always loved to see him, he was not much missed in Brook-street, where, indeed, plenty of people came.

Plenty of people and of all kinds. Constituents up from Scotland on business, or friends of constituents with letters of introduction from their friends to Kilsyth; to whom also came old boys from the clubs, who had nothing else to do, and liked to smoke a morning cigar or drink a before-luncheon glass of sherry with the hospitable laird; old boys who never penetrated beyond the ground-

floor, save perhaps on one night in the season, which Lady Muriel set apart for the reception of "the House" and "the House" wives and daughters, when they would make their way upstairs and cling round the lintels of the drawing-room, and obstruct all circulation, and eat a very good supper, and for three or four days afterwards wag their heads at each other in the bow-windows of Brookes's or Barnes's, and inform each other with great solemnity that Lady Muriel was a "dayvilish fine woman," and that "the thing had been doosid well done at Kilsyth's the other night, eh?" Other visitors, nominally to Kilsyth, but in reality after their reception by him relegated to Lady Muriel, keen-looking, clear-eyed, high-cheek-boned men, wonderfully "canny"-looking, thoroughly Scotch, only wanting the pinch of snuff between their fingers, and the kilt round their legs, to have fitted them for taking their station at the tobacconists' doors,—factors from different portions of the estate, whom Lady Muriel took in hand, and with them went carefully through every item of their accounts, leaving them mar-

vellously impressed with her qualities as a woman of business.

No very special visitors to Lady Muriel. Plenty of carriages with women, young and old, elegant and dowdy, aristocratic and plebeian, on the front seat, and the *Court Guide* in all its majesty on the back. Plenty of raps, preposterous in their potency, delivered with unerring aim by ambrosial mercuries, who disengaged quite a cloud of powder in the operation; packs of cards, delivered like conjuring tricks into the hands of the hall-porter, over whose sleek head appeared a charming perspective of other servingmen; kind regards, tender inquiries, congratulations, condolence, P.P.C.'s, all the whole formula duly gone through between the ambrosial creatures who have descended from the monkey-board and the plethoric giant who has extricated himself from the leathern bee-hive—one of the principals in the mummery stolidly looking on from the carriage, the other sitting calmly upstairs, neither taking the smallest part, or caring the least about it. The lady visitors did not come in, as a rule,

but the men did, almost without exception. The men arrived from half-past four till half-past six, and, during the season, came in great numbers. Why? Well, Lady Muriel was very pleasant, and Miss Kilsyth was "charmin', quite charmin'." They said this parrot-wise; there are no such parrots as your modern young men; they repeat whatever they have learnt constantly, but between their got-by-rote sentences they are fatally and mysteriously dumb.

"Were you at the Duchess's last night, Lady Muriel?"

"Yes! You were not there, I think?"

"No; couldn't go—was on duty."

Pause. Dead silence. Five clocks ticking loudly and running races with each other.

"Yes, by the way, knew you were there."

"Did you—who told you?"

"Saw it in the paper, 'mongst the comp'ny, don't you know, and that kind of thing."

Awful pause. Clocks take up the running. Lady Muriel looks on the carpet. Visitor calmly scrutinises furniture round the room, at length he receives

inspiration from lengthened contemplation of his hat-lining.

"Seen Clement Penruddock lately?"

"Yes, he was here on—when was it?—quite lately—O, the day before yesterday."

"Poor old Clem! Going to marry Lady Violet Dumanoir, they say. Pity Lady Vi don't leave off putting that stuff on her face and shoulders, isn't it?"

"How ridiculous you are!"

"No, but really! she does!"

"How can you be so silly!"

Grand and final pause of ten minutes, broken by the visitor's saying quietly, "Well, good-bye," *and lounging off to repeat the invigorating conversation elsewhere.*

Who? Youth of all kinds. The junior portion of the Household Brigade, horse and foot, solemn plungers and dapper little guardsmen; youth from the Whitehall offices, specially diplomatic and erudite, and disposed to chaff the military as ignorant of most things, and specially of spelling; idlers *purs et simples*, who had been last year in

Norway, and would be the next in Canada, and who suffered socially from their perpetual motion, never being able to retain the good graces which they had gained or to recover those they had lost; foreign *attachés;* junior representatives of the plutocracy, who went into society into which their fathers might never have dreamed of penetrating, but who found the "almighty dollar," or its equivalent, when judiciously used, have all the open-sesame power; an occasional Scotch connection on a passing visit to London, and—Mrs. M'Diarmid.

Who was Mrs. M'Diarmid? That was the first question everyone asked on their introduction to her; the second, on their revisiting the house where the introduction had taken place, being, "Where is Mrs. M'Diarmid?" Mrs. M'Diarmid was originally Miss Whiffin, daughter of Mrs. Whiffin of Salisbury-street in the Strand, who let lodgings, and in whose parlours George M'Diarmid, second cousin to the present Kilsyth, lived when he first came to London, and enrolled himself as a student in the Inner Temple. A

pleasant fellow George M'Diarmid, with a taste for pleasure, and very little money, and an impossibility to keep out of debt. A good-looking fellow, with a bright blue eye, and big red whiskers (beards were not in fashion then, or George would have grown a very Birnam-Wood of hair), and broad shoulders, and a genial jovial manner with "the sex." Deep into Mrs. Whiffin's books went George, and simultaneously deep into her daughter's heart; and finally, when Kilsyth had done his best for his scapegrace kinsman, and could do no more, and nobody else would do anything, George wiped off his score by marrying Miss Whiffin, and, as she expressed it to her select circle of friends, "making a lady of her." It was out of his power to do that. Nothing on earth would have made Hannah Whiffin a lady, any more than anything on earth could have destroyed her kindness of heart, her devotion to her husband, her hard-working, honest striving to do her duty as his wife. Kilsyth would not have been the large-souled glorious fellow that he was if he had failed to see this, or seeing,

had failed to appreciate and recognise it. George M'Diarmid hemmed and hawed when told to bring his wife to Brook-street, and blushed and stuttered when he brought her; but Kilsyth and Lady Muriel set the poor shy little woman at her ease in an instant, and seeing all her good qualities, remained her kind and true friends. After two years or so George M'Diarmid died in his wife's arms, blessing and thanking her; and after his death, to the astonishment of all who knew anything about it, his widow was as constant a visitor to Brook-street as ever. Why? No one could exactly tell, save that she was a shrewd, clever woman, with an extraordinary amount of real affection for every member of the family. There was no mistake about that. She had been tried in times of sickness and of trouble, and had always come out splendidly. A vulgar old lady, with curious blunt manners and odd phrases of speech, which had at first been dreadfully trying; but by degrees the regular visitors to the house began to comprehend her, to make allowance for her *gaucheries* and her

quaint sayings—in fact to take the greatest delight in them. So Mrs. M'Diarmid was constantly in Brook-street, and the frequenters of the five-o'clock tea-table professed to be personally hurt if she absented herself.

A shrewd little woman too, with a special care for Madeleine; with a queer old-world notion that she, being herself childless, should look after the motherless girl. For Lady Muriel Mrs. M'Diarmid had the highest respect; but Lady Muriel had children of her own, and, naturally enough, was concerned about, or as Mrs. M'Diarmid expressed it, "wropped up" in them, and Madeleine had no one to protect and guide her —poor soul! So this worthy little old woman devoted herself to the motherless girl, and watched over her with duenna-like care and almost maternal fidelity.

Five o'clock in he evening, two days after Wilmot had received Madeleine's little note; the shutters were shut in Lady Muriel's boudoir, the curtains were drawn, a bright fire burned on the hearth, and the tea-equipage was ready set

on the little round table close by the hostess. Not many people there. Not Kilsyth, of course, who was reading the evening papers and chatting at Brookes's, — not Ronald, who scarcely ever showed at that time. Madeleine, looking very lovely in a tight-fitting high violet-velvet dress, a thought pale still, but with her blue eyes bright, and her golden hair taken off her face, and gathered into a great knot at the back of her pretty little head. Near her, on an ottoman, Clement Penruddock, half-entranced at the appearance of his own red stockings, half in wondering why he does not go off to see Lady Violet Dumanoir, his *fiancée*. Clem is always wondering about this, and never seems to arrive at a satisfactory result. Next to him, and vainly endeavouring to think of something to say, the Hon. Robert Brettles, familiarly known as "Bristles," from the eccentric state of his hair, who is supposed to be madly in love with Madeleine Kilsyth, and who has never yet made greater approaches in conversation with her than meteorological observations in regard to the weather,

and blushing demands for her hand in the dance. By Lady Muriel, Lord Roderick Douglas, who still finds his nose too large for the rest of his face, and strokes it thoughtfully in the palm of his hand, as though he could thereby quietly reduce its dimensions. Frank Only, Sir Coke's eldest son, but recently gazetted to the Body Guards, an ingenuous youth, dressed more like a tailor's dummy than anything else, especially about his feet, which are very small and very shiny; and Tommy Toshington, who has dropped in on the chance of hearing something which, cleverly manipulated and well told at the club, may gain him a dinner. In the immediate background sits Mrs. M'Diarmid, knitting.

Lady Muriel has poured out the tea; the gentlemen have handed the ladies their cups, and are taking their own; and the usual blank dulness has fallen on the company. Nobody says a word for full three minutes, when the silence is broken by Tommy Toshington, who begins to find his visit unremunerative, as hitherto he has not gleaned one atom of gossip. So he asks Lady

Muriel whether she has seen anything of Colonel Jefferson.

"No, indeed," Lady Muriel replies; "Colonel Jefferson has not been to see us since our return."

"Didn't know you were in town, perhaps," suggests the peace-loving Tommy.

"Must know that, Toshington," says Lord Roderick Douglas, who has no great love for Charley Jefferson, associating that stern commander with various causes of heavy field-days and refusals of leave.

"I don't see that," says Tommy, who has never been Lord Roderick's guest at mess or anywhere else, and who does not see a chance of hospitality in that quarter; consequently is by no means reticent,—"I don't see that; how was he to know it?"

"Same way that everybody else did—through the *Post*."

"Tommy can't read it," said Clement Penruddock; "they didn't teach spellin' ever so long ago, when Tommy was a boy."

"They taught manners," growled Tommy, "at all events; but they seem to have given that up."

"Charley Jefferson isn't in town," said "Bristles," cutting in quickly to stop the discussion; "he's down at Torquay. Had a letter from him yesterday, my lady; last man in the world, Charley, to be rude—specially to you or Miss Kilsyth."

"I am sure of that, Mr. Brettles," said Lady Muriel; "I fancied Colonel Jefferson must be away, or we should have seen him."

"People go away most strangelike," observed Mrs. M'Diarmid from the far distance. "The facilities of the road, the river, and the rail, as I've seen it somewhere expressed, is such, that one's here to-day, Lord bless you, and next week in the Sydney Isles or thereabouts."

By "the Sydney Isles or thereabouts," Mrs. M'Diarmid's friends had by long experience ascertained that she meant Australia.

"Scarcely so far as that in so short a time, Aunt Hannah," said Madeleine with a smile.

"Well, my dear, far enough to fare worse, as

the expression is. I don't hold with such wanderings, thinking home to be home, be it ever so homely."

"You would not like to go far away yourself, would you, Mrs. M'Diarmid?" asked Lord Roderick.

"Not I, my lord; Regent-street for me is quite very, and beyond that I have no inspiration."

"You've never been able to get Mrs. M'Diarmid even so far as Kilsyth, have you, Lady Muriel?" said Clement.

"No; she has always refused to come to us. I think she imagines we're utter barbarians at Kilsyth."

"Not at all, my dear, not at all," said the old lady; "but everybody has their fancies, and knows what they can do, and where they're useful; and fancy me at my time of life tossing my cabers, or doing my Tullochgorums, or whatever they're called, between two crossed swords on the top of a mountain! Scarcely respectable, I think."

"You're quite right, Mrs. Mac, and I honour your sentiments," said Clem with a half-grin.

"Not but that I would have gone through all that and a good deal more, my darling," said the old lady, putting down her work, crossing the room, and taking Madeleine's pale face between her own fat little hands, "to have been with you in your illness, and to have nursed you. Duchesses indeed!" cried Mrs. Mac, with a sniff of defiance at the remembrance of the Northallerton defection—"I'd have duchessed 'em, if I'd had my way!"

"You would have been the dearest and best nurse in the world, I know, Aunt Hannah," said Madeleine; then added, with a half sigh, "though I could not have been better attended to than I was, I think."

Lady Muriel marked the half sigh instantly, and looked across at her step-daughter. Reassured at the perfect calm of Madeleine's face, on which there was no blush, no tremor, she said, "You wrote that note, Madeleine, according to your father's wish?"

"Two days ago, mamma."

"Two days ago! I should have thought that—"

"Perhaps he is very much engaged, mamma, and knew that there was no pressing need of his services. Dr. Wilmot told me that—" and the girl hesitated, and stopped.

"Is that Dr. Wilmot of Charles-street, close by the Junior? Are you talking of him?" said Penruddock. "Doosid clever feller they say he is. He's been attending my cousin Cranbrook —you know him, Lady Muriel; been awfully bad poor Cranbrook has; head shaved, and holloing out, and all that kind of thing—frightful; and this doctor has pulled him through like a bird—splendidly, by Jove!"

"He drives an awful pair of screws," said "Bristles," who was horsey in his tastes; "saw 'em standing at Cranbrook's door. To look at 'em, you wouldn't think they could drag that thundering big heavy brougham—C springs, don't you know, Clem?—and yet when they start they nip along stunningly."

"Ah, those poor doctors!" said Mrs. M'Diarmid; "I often wonder how they live, for they take no exercise now all the streets are M'Adam

and wood and all sorts of nonsense! When there was good sound stone pavement, one was bumped about in your carriage like riding a trotting-horse, and that was all the exercise the poor doctors got. Now they don't get that."

"And Dr. Wilmot attended Lord Cranbrook, did he, Clem?" asked Madeleine softly, "and brought him safely through his illness. I'm glad of that; I'm glad—"

"Dr. Wilmot, my lady!" said the groom of the chambers.

"What a bore that doctor coming," said Clement Penruddock, looking round, "just as I was going to have a pleasant talk with Maddy!"

"You leave Maddy alone," said Mrs. M'Diarmid with a grunt, "and go off to your financier!"

"My financier, Aunt Hannah?" said Clem in astonishment; "I haven't one; I wish to Heaven I had."

"Haven't one?" retorted the old lady. "Pray, what do you call Lady Vi?"

And then Clement Penruddock understood that Mrs. M'Diarmid meant his *fiancée*.

Dr. Wilmot and Madeleine went, at Lady Muriel's request, into the drawing-room.

He was with her once again; looked in her eyes, heard her voice murmuring thanks to him for all his past kindness, touched her hand—no longer hot with fever, but tremblingly dropping into his — saw the sweet smile which had come upon her with the earliest dawn of convalescence. At the same time Wilmot remarked a faint flush on her cheek and a baleful light in her eyes, which recalled to him the discovery which he had made at Kilsyth, and which he had mentioned to her father. His diagnosis had been short then and hurried, but it had been true: the seeds of the disease were in her, and, unchecked, were likely to bear fatal fruit. Could he leave her thus? could he absent himself, bearing about with him the knowledge that she whom he loved better than anything on earth might derive benefit from his assistance —might indeed owe her life and her earthly salvation to his ministering care? He knew well enough that though her father had given him his thorough trust and confidence, his friendship and

his warm gratitude, yet there were others about her who had no share in these feelings, by whom he was looked upon with doubt and suspicion, and who would be only too glad to relegate him to his position of the professional man who had fulfilled what was required of him, and had been discharged—not to be taken up again, until another case of necessity arose. There was no doubt that his diagnosis had been correct, and that her life required constant watching, perpetual care. Well, should she not have it? Was not he then close at hand? Had his talent ever been engaged in a case in which he took so deep, so vital an interest? Had he not often given up his every thought, his day's study, his night's repose, for the mere professional excitement of battling the insidious advances of Disease—of checking him here, and counterchecking him there, and finally cutting off his supplies, and routing him utterly? and would he not do this in the present instance, where such an interest as he had never yet felt, such an inducement as had never yet been held out to him, urged him on to victory?

Ah, yes; 'his grateful patient' should have greater claims on his gratitude than she herself imagined. He had seen her safely through a comparatively trifling illness; he would be by her side in the struggle that threatened her life. Come what might, win or lose, he should be there, able, as he thought, to help her in danger, whatever might be the result to himself of his efforts.

He has her hand in his now, and is looking into her eyes—momentarily only; for the soft blue orbs droop beneath his glance, and the bright red flush leaps into the pale cheek. Still he retains her hand, and asks her, in a voice which vainly strives to keep its professional tone, such professional questions as admit of the least professional putting. She replies in a low voice, when suddenly a shadow falls upon them standing together; and looking up, they see Ronald Kilsyth. Dr. Wilmot utters the intruder's name; Madeleine is silent.

"Yes, Madeleine," says Ronald, addressing her as though she had spoken; "I have come to

fetch you to Lady Muriel.—I was not aware, sir," he added, turning to Wilmot, "that you were any longer in attendance on this young lady. I thought that her illness was over, and that your services had been dispensed with."

Constitutionally pale, Ronald now, under the influence of strong excitement, was almost livid; but he had not one whit more colour than Chudleigh Wilmot, as he replied: "You were right, Captain Kilsyth: my professional visits are at an end; it is as a friend that I am now visiting your sister."

Ronald drew himself up as he said, "I have yet to learn, Dr. Wilmot, that you are on such terms with the family as to justify you in paying these friendly visits.—Madeleine, come with me."

The girl hesitated for an instant; but Ronald placed her arm in his, and walked off with her to the door, leaving Chudleigh Wilmot immovable with astonishment and rage.

CHAPTER IV.

GIVING UP.

Rage was quite a novel passion for Chudleigh Wilmot, and one which, like most new passions, obtained for the time complete mastery over him. In his previous career he had been so steeped in study, so overwhelmed by practice—had had every hour of his time so completely and unceasingly occupied, that he had had no leisure to get into a rage, even if he had had the slightest occasion. But the truth is, the occasion had been wanting also. During the time he had been at the hospital he had had various tricks played upon him,—such tricks as the idle always will play upon the industrious,—but he had not paid the least attention to them; and when the perpetrators of the practical jokes found they were disregarded, they turned the tide of their humour

upon some one else less pachydermatous. Ever since then his life had flowed in an even stream, which never turned aside into a whirlpool of passion or a cataract of rage, but continued its calm course without the smallest check or shoal. In the old days, when driven nearly to madness by the calm way in which her husband took every event in life, undisturbed by public news or private worry, finding the be-all and the end-all of life in the prosecution of his studies, the correctness of his diagnoses, and the number of profitable visits daily entered up in his diary, Mabel Wilmot would have given anything if he had now and then broken out into a fit of rage, no matter for what cause, and thus cleared the dull heavy atmosphere of tranquil domesticity for ever impending over them. But he never did break out; and the atmosphere, as we have seen, was never cleared.

But Chudleigh Wilmot was in a rage at last. By nature he was anything but a coward, was endowed with a keen sensitiveness, and scrupulously honourable. His abstraction, his studiousness, his

simple unworldly ways—for there were few more unworldly men than the rising fashionable physician—all prevented his easily recognising that he was a butt for intentional ribaldry or insult; but when, as in this case, he did see it, it touched him to the quick. As a boy he could laugh at the practical jokes of his fellow-students; as a man he writhed under and rebelled against the first slight that since his manhood he had received. What was to be done? This young man, this Captain Kilsyth, her brother, had studiously and purposely insulted him, and insulted him before her. As this thought rushed through Wilmot's mind, as he stood as though rooted to the spot where they had left him in the drawing-room in Brook-street, his first feeling was to rush after Ronald and strike him to the ground as the penalty of his presumption. His fingers itched to do it, clenched themselves involuntarily, as his teeth set and his nostrils dilated involuntarily. What good would that do? None. Come of it what might, Madeleine's name would be mixed up with it, and — Ah, good God! he saw it all;

saw the newspaper paragraph with the sensation-heading, "Fracas in private life between a gallant Officer and a distinguished Physician;" he saw the blanks and asterisks under which Madeleine's name would be concealed; he guessed the club scandal which—No, that would never do. He must give up all thoughts of avenging himself in that manner, for her sake. Better bear what he had borne, better bear slight and insult worse a thousandfold, than have her mixed up in a newspaper paragraph, or given over to the genial talk of society.

He must bear it, put up with the insult, swallow his disgust, forego his revenge. There was not enough of the Christian element in Chudleigh Wilmot's composition to render this line of conduct at all palatable to him; but it was necessary, and should be pursued. He had gone through all this in his thought, and arrived at this determination before he moved from the drawing-room. Then he walked quietly down to Lady Muriel's boudoir, entered, chatted with her ladyship for five minutes on indifferent topics, and

took his leave, perfectly cool without, raging hot within.

As he had correctly thought, his long absence from London had by no means injured his practice; if anything, had improved it. In every class of life there is such a thing as making yourself too cheap, and the healthy and wealthy hypochondriacs, who form six-sevenths of a fashionable physician's *clientèle*, are rather incited and stimulated when they find the doctor unable or unwilling to attend their every summons. So Wilmot's practice was immense. He had a very large number of visits to pay that day, and he paid them all with thorough scrupulousness. Never had his manner been more *suave* and bland; never had he listened more attentively to his patients' narratives of their complaints; never had his eyebrow-upliftings been more telling, the noddings of his head thrown in more *apropos*. The old ladies, who worshipped him, thought him more delightful than ever; the men were more and more convinced of his talent; but the truth is, that having no really serious case on hand,

Dr. Wilmot permitted himself the luxury of thought; and while he was clasping Lady Cawdor's pulse, or peering down General Donaldbain's throat, he was all the time wondering what line of conduct he could best pursue towards Ronald and Madeleine Kilsyth. In the course of his afternoon drive he passed the carriages of scores of his brother practitioners, with whom he exchanged hurried bows and nods, all of whom returned to the perusal of the *Lancet* or of their diaries, as the case might be, with envy at their hearts, and jealousy of the successful man who succeeded in everything, and who, if they had only known it, was quivering under the slight and insult which he had just received.

His visits over, he went home and dined quietly. The romantic feelings connected with an "empty chair" troubled Chudleigh Wilmot very little. He had never paid very much attention to the person by whom the chair had been filled; indeed very frequently during Mabel's lifetime he had done what he always had done since her death, taken a book, and read during his dinner. But he could

not read on this occasion. He tried, and failed dismally; the print swam before his eyes; he could not keep his attention for a moment on the book; he pushed it away, and gave up his mind to the subject with which it was preoccupied.

Fair, impartial, and judicial self-examination—that was what he wanted, what he must have. Captain Kilsyth had insulted him, purposely no doubt; why? Not for an instant did Wilmot attempt to disguise from himself that it was on Madeleine's account; but how could Captain Kilsyth know anything of his (Wilmot's) feelings in regard to Madeleine; and if he did know of them, why should he now object? Captain Kilsyth might be standing out on the question of family; but that would never lead him to behave in so *brusque* and ungentlemanly a manner; he might object to the alliance—to the alliance!—good God! here was he giving another man credit for speculating on matters which had only dimly arisen even in his own brain!

Still there remained the fact of Captain Kilsyth's conduct having been as it had been, and

still remained the question—why? To no creature on earth had he, Chudleigh Wilmot, confided his love for this girl; and so far as he knew—and he searched his memory carefully—he had never in his manner betrayed his secret in the remotest degree. Had his wife been alive, Ronald Kilsyth might have objected to finding him in close converse with his sister; yet in the fact of his having a wife lay—

It flashed across him in an instant, and sent the blood rushing to his heart. The manner of his wife's death—was that known? The causes which, as Henrietta Prendergast had hinted to him, had led Mabel to the vial with the leaden seal—had they leaked out? had they reached the ears of this young man? Did he suspect that jealousy—no matter whether with or without foundation — of his sister had led Mrs. Wilmot to lay violent hands upon herself? And if he suspected it, why not a hundred others? The story would fly from mouth to mouth. This Captain Kilsyth—no; he would not lend his aid to its promulgation; he could not for his sister's sake; but — And yet, with or

against Captain Kilsyth's wish, it must come out. When his visits ceased in Brook-street, as they must cease—he had determined on that; when he no longer saw Madeleine, who, as he perfectly well knew, had been brought to London with the view of being under his care, would not old Kilsyth make inquiries as to the change in the intended programme, and would not his son have to tell him all he had heard? It was too horrible to think of. With such a rumour in existence—granting that it was a rumour merely, and all unproved—it would be impossible for Kilsyth, however eagerly he might wish it, to befriend him—at least in the manner in which he could best befriend him, by encouraging his addresses to Madeleine. Lady Muriel would not listen to it; Ronald would not listen to it, even if those two were in some way—he could not think how, but there might be a way of getting round those two and winning them to his side—even if that were done, while that horrible story or suspicion was current—and it was impossible to set it at rest without the chance of establishing it firmly for ever — Kil-

syth would never consent to his marriage with Madeleine.

He must at once free himself from the chance of any story of this kind being promulgated. The more he thought the matter over, the more he saw the impossibility of again going to Brook-street, after what had occurred; the impossibility of his absence passing without remark and inquiry by Kilsyth; the impossibility of Ronald's withholding his statement of his own conduct in the matter, and his reasons for that conduct. For an instant a ray of hope shot through Chudleigh Wilmot's soul, as he thought that perhaps the reasons might be infinitely less serious and less damaging than he had depicted them to himself; but it died out again at once, and he acknowledged to himself the hopelessness of his situation. He had been indulging in a day-dream from which he had been rudely and ruthlessly waked, and his action must now be prompt and decisive. There was an end to it all; it was Kismet, and he must accept his fate. No combined future for Madeleine and him; their paths lay sepa-

rate, and must be trodden separately at once; her brother was right, his own dead wife was right—it is not to be!

There must be no blinking or shuffling with the question now, he thought. To remain in London without visiting in Brook-street would evoke immediate and peculiar attention; and it was plain that Ronald Kilsyth had determined that Dr. Wilmot's visits to Brook-street were not to be renewed. He must leave London, must leave England at once. He must go abroad for six months, for a year; must give up his practice, and seek change and repose in fresh scenes. He would spoil his future by so doing, blow up and shatter the fabric which he had reared with such industry and patience and self-denial; but what of that? He should ascribe his forced expatriation and retreat to loss of health, and he should at least reap pity and condolence; whereas now every moment that he remained upon the scene he ran the chance of being overwhelmed with obloquy and scorn. He could imagine, vividly enough, how the patients whom he had refused to flatter,

whose self-imagined maladies he had laughed at and ridiculed, would turn upon him; how his brother practitioners, who had always hated him for his success, would point to the fulfilment of their never-delivered prophecies, and make much of their own idleness and incompetency; how the medical journals which he had riddled and scathed would issue fierce diatribes over his fall, or, worse than all, sympathise with the profession on—he could almost see the words in print before him—"the breach of that confidence which is the necessary and sacred bond between the physician and the patient."

Anything better than that; and he must take the decisive step at once! He must give up his practice. Whittaker should have it, so far at least as his recommendation could serve him. He should have that, and must rely upon himself for the rest. Many of his patients knew Whittaker now, had become accustomed to him during the time of Wilmot's absence at Kilsyth, and Whittaker had not behaved badly during that—that horrible affair of Mabel's last illness. More-

over, if Whittaker suspected the cause of Mabel's death — and Wilmot shuddered as the mere thought crossed his mind—the practice would be a sop to him to induce him to hold his tongue in the matter. And he, Wilmot, would go away —and be forgotten. Better that, bitter as the thought might be—and how bitter it was none but those who have been compelled, for conscience' sake, for honour's sake, for expediency's sake even, to give up in the moment of success, to haul down the flag, and sheath the sword when they knew victory was in their grasp, could ever tell; —better that than to remain, with the chance of exposure to himself, of compromise to *her*. The mental overthrow, the physical suffering consequent upon the sudden death of his wife, would be sufficient excuse for this step to the world; and there were none to know the real cause of its being taken. He had saved sufficient money to enable him to live as comfortably as he should care to live, even if he never returned to work again; and once free from the torturing doubt which oppressed him, or rather from the possi-

bility of all which that torturing doubt meant to his fevered mind, he should be himself again.

Beyond his position, so hardly struggled for, so recently attained, he had nothing to leave behind him which he should particularly regret. He had been so self-contained, from the very means necessary for attaining that position, had been so circumscribed in the pleasures of his life, that his opportunities for the cultivation even of friendship had been very rare. He should miss the quaint caustic conversation, the earnest hearty liking so undeniably existing, even under its slight veneer of eccentricity, of old Foljambe; he should miss what he used laughingly to call his "dissipation" of attending a few professional and scientific gatherings held in the winter, where the talk was all "shop," dry and uninteresting to the uninitiated, but full of delight to the listeners, and specially to the talkers; he should miss the excitement of the lecture-theatre, where perhaps more than anywhere else he thoroughly enjoyed himself, and where he shone at his very brightest, and—that was all. No! Made-

leine! this last and keenest source of enjoyment in his life, this pure spring of freshness and vigour, this revivification of early hopes and boyish dreams, this young girl, the merest acquaintance with whom had softened and purified his heart, had given aim and end to his career, had shown him how dull and heartless, how unloved, unloving, and unlovely had been his byegone time, and had aroused in him such dreams of uncensurable ambition for the future,—she must be given up, must become a "portion and parcel of the dreadful past," and be dead to him for ever! She must be given up! He repeated the words mechanically, and they rang in his ears like a knell. She must be given up! She was given up, even then, if he carried out his intention. He should never see her again, should never see the loving light in those blue eyes—ah, how well he minded him of the time when he first saw it in the earliest days of her convalescence at Kilsyth, and of all the undefined associations which it awakened in him!—should never hear the grateful accents of her soft sweet

voice, should never touch her pretty hand again. For all the years of his life, as it appeared to him, he had held his eyes fixed upon the ground, and had raised them at the rustle of an angel's wings, only to see her float far beyond his reach. For all the years of his life he had toiled wearily on through the parching desert; and at length, on meeting the green oasis, where the fresh well sparkled so cheerily, had had the cup shattered from his trembling hand.

She must be given up! She should be; that was the very keystone of the arrangement. He had looked the whole question fairly in the face; and what he had proposed to himself, and had determined on abiding by, he would not shrink from now. But it was hard, very hard. And then he lay back in his chair, and in his mind retraced all the circumstances of his acquaintance with her; last of all, coming upon their final interview of that morning in the drawing-room at Brook-street. He was sufficiently calm now to eliminate Ronald and his truculence from the scene, and to think only of Madeleine; and that

brought to his remembrance the reason of their having gone into the drawing-room together, to consult on her illness, the weakness of the lungs which he had detected at Kilsyth.

That was a new phase of the subject, which had not occurred to him before. Not merely must he give her up and absent himself from her, but he must leave her at a time when his care and attention might be of vital importance to her. Like most leading men in his profession, Chudleigh Wilmot, with a full reliance on himself, combined a wholesome distrust of and disbelief in most of his brother practitioners. There were few—half a dozen at the most, perhaps—in whose hands Madeleine might be safely left, if they had some special interest, such as he had, in her case. Such as he had! Wilmot could not avoid a grim smile as he thought of old Dr. Blenkiron, with his snuff-dusted shirt-frill, or little Dr. Prater, with his gold-rimmed spectacles, feeling similar interest to his in this sweet girl. But unless they had special interest—unless they could have given up a certain amount of their time regularly to attending

to her—it would have been of little use, as her symptoms were for ever varying, and wanted constant watching. And as for the general run of the profession, even men so well thought of as Whittaker or Perkins, he—stay, a good thought—old Sir Saville Rowe would probably be coming to town for the winter; and the old gentleman, though he had retired from active practice, would, Wilmot made sure, look after Madeleine for him as a special case. Sir Saville's brain was as clear as ever; and though his strength was insufficient to enable him to continue his practice, this one case would be an amusement rather than a trouble to him. Yes, that was the best way of meeting this part of the difficulty. Wilmot could go away at least without the additional anxiety of his darling's being without competent advice. So much of his burden could be lightened by Sir Saville; and he would sit down at once and write to the old gentleman, asking him to undertake the charge.

He moved to his writing-table and sat down at it. He had arranged the paper before him and taken up his pen, when he suddenly stopped,

threw aside the pen, and flung himself back in his chair. What excuse was he about to make to his old master for his leaving London at so critical a period in his career? He had not sufficiently considered that. He had intended saying that Mrs. Wilmot's sudden death had had such an effect upon him physically and mentally, that he felt compelled to relinquish practice, at least for the present, and to seek abroad for that rest and change of scene which was absolutely necessary for him. He had turned the phrases very neatly in his mind, but he had forgotten one thing. He had forgotten his conversation with the old gentleman on the garden walk overhanging the brawling Tay on the morning when he received the telegram from Kilsyth. He had forgotten how he had laughed in derision when Sir Saville had asked him whether he was in love with his wife; how he had curtly hinted that Mabel was all very well in her way, but holding a decidedly inferior position in his estimation to his practice and his work. He remembered all this now, and he saw how utterly futile it would be to attempt to

put off his old friend with such a story. What, then, should be the excuse? That his own health had given way under pressure of work? Sir Saville knew well how highly Wilmot appreciated his professional opinion; and had he believed the story—which was very unlikely—would have been hurt at his old pupil's rushing away without consulting him. In any case he must not see Sir Saville, who would undoubtedly cross-question him in detail about Mrs. Wilmot's illness. He must write to the old gentleman, giving a very general statement and avoiding all particulars, and requesting him to take Madeleine under his charge.

He did so. He wrote fully and affectionately to his old friend. He touched very slightly on the death of his wife, beyond hinting that that occurrence had necessitated his departing at once for the Continent on some law-business concerning property, by which he might probably be detained for some time. He went on to say that he had made arrangements for the transfer of his practice to Whittaker, who had had it, as Sir Saville would remember, during Chudleigh's absence in Scot-

land; but there was one special case, which he could only leave in the hands of Sir Saville himself: this was Miss Kilsyth. Sir Saville would remember his (Wilmot's) disinclination to accede to the request contained in the telegram on that eventful morning; and indeed it seemed curious to himself now, when he thought of the interest which he took in all that household. Kilsyth himself was the most charming &c., and the best specimen of an &c.; Lady Muriel was also, and her little girls were angels. Miss Kilsyth was mentioned last of all the family in Wilmot's letter, and was merely described as "an interesting, amiable girl." This portion of the letter was principally occupied with details of her threatened disease; and on reperusing it before sending it away, Wilmot was greatly struck by, as it seemed to him, the capital manner in which he had made his interest throughout assume a purely professional form. But, whether professionally or not, the interest was very earnestly put; and the desire that the old gentleman should break through his retirement and attend to this particular case was very strongly

expressed. In conclusion, Wilmot said that he should send his address to his old friend, and that he hoped to be kept acquainted with Miss Kilsyth's state.

Dr. Wilmot did not send his letter to the post that night. He read it over the next morning after seeing his home patients, and when the carriage was at the door to take him off on his rounds. He was quite satisfied with the tone of the letter, which he placed in an envelope and was just about to seal, when his servant entered and announced "Captain Kilsyth."

CHAPTER V.

FACE TO FACE.

"CAPTAIN KILSYTH!" No time for Chudleigh Wilmot to deny himself, if even he had so wished; no time to recover himself from the excitement which the announcement had aroused. He saw the broad dark outline of his visitor behind the servant.

"Show Captain Kilsyth in."

Captain Kilsyth came in. Wilmot noticed that he was very pale and stern-looking, but that there was no trace of yesterday's excitement about him. It had become second nature to Wilmot to notice these things; and he found himself critically examining Ronald's external appearance, as he would that of a patient who had sought his advice.

The men bowed to each other, and Ronald

spoke first. "You will be surprised to see me here, Dr. Wilmot," he said; "but be assured that it is business of importance that brings me."

Wilmot bowed again. He was fast recovering from his agitation, but scarcely dared trust himself to speak just yet.

"I see your carriage is at the door, and I will detain you but a very few moments. You can give me, say, ten minutes?"

Wilmot muttered that his time was at Captain Kilsyth's disposal; an avowal which apparently annoyed his visitor, for he said testily, "You and I should be above exchanging the polite trash of society, Dr. Wilmot. I am come here to speak on a matter which concerns me deeply, and those very near and dear to me even more deeply still. Are you prepared to hear me?"

Those very near and dear to him! O yes; Wilmot was prepared to hear him fully, and said as much. Would Captain Kilsyth be seated?

"I have come to talk to you, Dr. Wilmot, as a friend," commenced Ronald, dropping into a chair. "I daresay you are scarcely prepared for

that avowal, considering my conduct at our interview yesterday in Brook-street. Then I was hasty and inconsiderate; and for my conduct then I beg to tender my apologies frankly and freely. I trust they will be received?" There was an odd square blunt honesty even in the manner in which he said this that prepossessed Wilmot.

"As frankly and freely as they are offered," he replied.

"So far agreed," said Ronald. "Now, look here. I am a very bad hand at beating about the bush; and I have come here to say things the mere fact of saying which is, where men of honour are not concerned, compromising to one of the persons spoken of. I have every belief that you are a man of honour, and therefore I speak."

Dr. Wilmot bowed again, and said that Captain Kilsyth complimented him.

"No. I think too highly of you to do that. I simply speak what I believe to be true, from all I have heard of your doings at Kilsyth."

Of his doings at Kilsyth? A man of honour,

from his doings at Kilsyth? Though perfectly conscious that Ronald was watching him narrowly, Chudleigh Wilmot's cheeks coloured deeply at this point, and he was silent.

"Now, Dr. Wilmot, I must begin by talking to you a little about myself—an unprofitable subject, but one necessary to be touched upon in this discourse between us. The men who are supposed to know me intimately—my own brother officers, I mean—will tell you that I am an oddity, an extraordinary fellow, and that they know nothing about me. Nothing is known of my likes or dislikes. I am believed not to have any of either. Now this is an exaggerated view of the question. I don't know that I dislike anyone in particular; but I have my affections. I am very fond of my father; I adore my sister Madeleine."

He spoke with such earnestness and warmth, that Wilmot looked up at him, half in pleasure, half in wonder. Ronald noticed the glance, and said, "If you have heard me mentioned at all, Dr. Wilmot, you have probably heard it said that I am a man with a stone instead of a heart,

with the *Cavalry Officer's Instructions* instead of a Bible; and therefore I cannot wonder at your look of astonishment. But what I have stated to you is pure and simple fact. I love these two infinitely better than my life."

Wilmot bowed again. He felt ashamed of his reiterated acquiescence, but had nothing more satisfactory to proffer.

"Now, I don't see much of my family," pursued Ronald. "Their ways of life are different from mine; and except when they happen to be in London we are seldom thrown together. This may be to be regretted, or it may not; at all events the fact is so. But whether I see them or not, my interest in them never slackens. There are people, I know—most people, I believe—to whom propinquity is a necessary ingredient for affection. They must be near those they love—must be brought into constant communication, personal communication with them, or their love dies out. That is affection of a type which I cannot understand; it is a great deal too spaniel- or ivy-like for my comprehension. I could go on

for years without seeing those I love, and love them all the same. Consequently, although when the eight or nine weeks' whirl which my family calls the London season is at an end, and I scarcely see them until it begins again, I do not take less interest in their proceedings, nor is my keen affection for those I love one whit diminished. You follow me?"

"So far, perfectly."

"I was detained here on duty in London during last August and September; and even if I had been free, I doubt whether I should have been with my people at Kilsyth. As I have just said, their ways of life, their amusements and pursuits are different from mine, and I should probably have been following my own fancies somewhere else. But I always hear from some of them with the greatest regularity; and I heard, of course, of my sister's illness, and of your being called in to attend upon her. Your name was thoroughly familiar to me. What my friends call my 'odd ways' have made me personally acquainted with several of the leading members of

your profession; and directly I heard that you had arrived at Kilsyth, I knew that Madeleine could not possibly be in better hands."

To anyone else Wilmot would have said that she could not have been under the charge of anyone who would have taken greater interest in her case; but he had not forgotten the interview of yesterday, and he forbore.

"I was delighted to hear of your arrival at Kilsyth," continued Ronald, "and I was deeply grateful to you for the unceasing care and anxiety which, as reported to me, you bestowed upon my sister. The accounts which I received vied with each other in doing justice to your skill and your constant attention; and I believe, as I know all at Kilsyth believed, that, under Providence, we owe Madeleine's life to you."

"You will pardon my interrupting you, Captain Kilsyth," said Wilmot, speaking almost for the first time; "but you give me more credit than I deserve. Miss Kilsyth was very ill; but what she required most was constant attention and watching. The excellent doctor of the dis-

trict—I forget his name, I'm ashamed to say—Joyce, Dr. Joyce, would have been thoroughly efficient, and would have doubtless restored Miss Kilsyth to health as speedily as I did; only unfortunately others had a claim upon him, and he could not devote his time to her."

"Exactly what I was saying. I presume it will not be doubted that Dr. Wilmot, of Charles-street, St. James's—in his own line the principal physician of London—had as many calls upon his time even as the excellent doctor of the district, and yet he sacrificed all others to attend on Miss Kilsyth."

"Dr. Wilmot was away from his patients on a holiday, and no one had a claim upon his time."

"And he made the most of his holiday by spending a great portion of it in the sick-room of a fever-stricken patient! No, no, Dr. Wilmot; you made a great sacrifice undoubtedly. Now, why did you make it?"

He turned suddenly upon Wilmot as he spoke, and looked him straight in the face. Wilmot's colour came again; he moved restlessly in his

chair, pressed his hands nervously together, but said nothing.

"I told you, Dr. Wilmot, that I was about to speak of things the mere mention of which, were we not men of honour, would be compromising to some of the persons spoken of. I ask you why you made that sacrifice of your professional time. I ask you not for information, because I know the reason. Before you left Kilsyth, I heard that my sister was receiving attention from a most undesirable quarter—from a quarter whence it was impossible that any good could arise. My sister is, as I have told you, dearer to me than my life, and the news distressed me beyond measure. I turned it over and over in my mind; I made every possible kind of inquiry. At length, on the evening on which you arrived in London and called on me at my club, I knew that you were the man alluded to by my informant."

No change in Chudleigh Wilmot. His cheek is still flushed, his eyes still cast down; still he moves restlessly in his chair, still his hands pluck nervously at each other.

"I knew it, and yet I hardly could believe it. I knew that men of your profession, specially men of such eminence in your profession, were in the habit of being received and treated with the utmost confidence; which confidence was never abused. I knew that bystanders and lookers-on, unaccustomed to illness, might very easily misconstrue the attention which a physician would pay to a young lady whose case had excited his strong professional interest. I—well, constrained to take the worst view of it—I knew that you were a married man, and I thought that you might have admired Miss Kilsyth, and that—that when you left her—there—there would be an end of the feeling."

No change in Chudleigh Wilmot. His cheek is still flushed, his eyes still cast down; still he moves restlessly in his chair, still his hands pluck nervously at each other. Something in his appearance seemed to touch Ronald Kilsyth as he looked at him earnestly, for he said:

"I wish to God I could think so now, Dr. Wilmot! I wish to God I could think so now!

But though I don't pretend to be versed in these matters, I have a certain amount of insight; and when I saw you standing by my sister's side in the drawing-room in Brook-street yesterday, I knew that the information I had received was correct." He paused for an instant, and passed his hand across his forehead, then resumed. "I am a blunt man, Dr. Wilmot, but I trust neither coarse nor unsympathetic. I want to convey to you as quietly as possible that you have made a mistake; that for everyone's sake—ours, Madeleine's, your own—this thing cannot, must not be."

A change in Chudleigh Wilmot now. He does not look up; he covers his brow with his left hand; but he says in a deep husky voice:

"There is—as you are aware—a change in my circumstances: I am—I am free now; and perhaps—in the future—"

"In no future, Dr. Wilmot," interrupted Ronald gravely, but not unkindly. "Listen to me. If, as I half suspected you would, you had flung yourself into a rage,—denied, stormed, pro-

tested,—I should simply have said my say, and left you to make the best or the worst of it. But you have not done this, and — and I pity you most sincerely. You are, as you say, free now. You think probably there is no reason why, at some future time, you should not ask my sister to become your wife. You would probably urge your claims upon her gratitude—claims which you think she might possibly be brought to allow. It can never be, Dr. Wilmot. I, who am anything but, in this sense, a worldly man, even I know that your presence at Kilsyth, your long stay there, to the detriment of your home interests, your devotion to my sister, have already given matter for talk to the gossips of society, and received the usual amount of malicious comment. And if you have real regard for Madeleine, you would give up anything to shield her from that, indorsed as would be the imputation and intensified as would be the malice, if your relations with her were to be on any other footing than—they ought to have been."

Quite silent now, Chudleigh Wilmot; his

hand still covering his brow, his head sunk upon his breast.

"I said I pitied you; and I do," continued Ronald. "And here, understand me, and let me explain one point in our position, Dr. Wilmot. What I have to say, though it may pain you in one way, will, I think, be satisfactory to you in another. You may think that Madeleine may be destined by her family for some — I speak without the least offence—some higher destiny; that her family would wish for her a husband higher in social rank. I give you my honour that, as far as I am concerned, I could not, from all I have heard of you, wish my sister's future confided to a more honourable man. Social rank and dignity weigh very little with me. My life is passed generally with those who have won their spurs, rather than inherited their titles; and I would infinitely sooner see my sister married to a man whose successful position in life was due to himself than to one who merely wore the reflected glory of his ancestors. So far you would have been a suitor entirely acceptable to me, had there

not been the other unfortunate element in the matter."

Ronald ceased speaking, and for some minutes there was a dead silence. Then Chudleigh Wilmot raised his head, rose from his chair, and commenced pacing the room with long strides; Ronald, perfectly understanding his emotion, remaining passively seated. At length Wilmot stopped by Ronald's chair, and said:

"When you entered this room, you told me you had come here to speak to me as a friend. I am bound to say that you have perfectly fulfilled that implicit promise. No one could have been more frank, more candid, and, I may say, more tender than you have been with me. My profession," said Wilmot with a dreary smile,— "my profession teaches us to touch wounds tenderly, and you seem to be thoroughly imbued with the precept. You will do me the justice to allow that I have listened to you patiently; that I have heard without flinching almost, certainly without complaint."

Ronald bowed his head in acquiescence.

"Now, then, I must ask you to listen to me. What I have to say to you is as sacred as what you have said to me, and will not, could not be mentioned by me to another living soul. When I received your father's telegram summoning me to your sister's bedside, there was no more heart-whole man in Britain than myself. When I use the word 'heart-whole,' I do not intend it to convey the expression of a perfect content in the affections I possessed, as you, knowing I was married and settled, might understand it. I was heart-whole in the sense that, while I was thoroughly skilled in the physical state of my heart, its mental condition never gave me a thought. I had, as long as I could recollect, been a very hard-working man. I had married, when I first established myself in practice, principally, I believe, because I thought it the most prudent thing for a young physician to do; but certainly not from any feeling that ever caused my heart one extra pulsation. You must not be shocked at this plain speaking. Recollect that you are listening to an anatomical lecture, and go through with it. All

the years of my married life passed without any such feeling being called into existence. My—my wife was a woman of quiet domestic temperament, who pursued her way quietly through life; and I, thoroughly engrossed in my professional pursuits, never thought that life had anything better to engage in than ambition, better to offer than success. I went to Kilsyth, and for weeks was engaged in constant, unremitting attendance upon your sister. I saw her under circumstances which must to a certain extent have invested the most uninteresting woman in the world with interest; I saw her deserted and shunned by everyone else, and left entirely to my care; I saw her in her access of delirium, and afterwards, when prostrate and weak, she was dependent on me for everything she wanted. And while she and I were thus together—I now combating the disease which assailed her, now watching the sweet womanly patience, the more than womanly courage, with which she supported its attacks—I, witnessing how pure and good she was, how soft and gentle, and utterly unlike anything I had

ever seen, save perhaps in years long past, began to comprehend that there was, after all, something to live for beyond the attainment of success and the accumulation of fees."

Wilmot stopped here, and looked at his companion; but Ronald's head was turned away, and he made no movement; so Wilmot proceeded.

"I—I scarcely know how to go on here; but I determined to tell you all, and I will go through with it. You cannot tell, you cannot have the smallest idea of what I have suffered. You were pleased to call me a man of honour: God alone knows how I struggled to deserve that title from you, from every member of Miss Kilsyth's family. I succeeded so well, that until I noticed the expression of your face yesterday, I believed no one on earth knew of the state of my feelings towards that young lady. At Kilsyth, when I first felt the fascination creeping over me; when I found that there was another, a better and a brighter be-all and end-all for human existence than I had previously imagined; when I found that the whole of my career had hitherto lacked, and

under then existent circumstances was likely to lack, all that could make it worth running after, the want had been discovered; I did my best to shut my eyes to what might have been, and to content myself with what was. I knew that though my—my wife and I had never professed any extravagant affection for each other; that though we had never been lovers, in the common acceptation of the word, she had discharged her duty most faithfully to me, and that I should be a scoundrel to be untrue to her in thought—in word, of course, from other considerations, it was impossible. I did my best, and my best availed. I succeeded so far, that I left your father's house with the knowledge that my secret was locked in my own breast, and that I had never made the slightest tentative advance to your sister, to see if she were even aware of its existence. More than this. During my attendance on Miss Kilsyth, I had discovered that she was suffering from a threatening of what the world calls consumption. I felt it my duty to mention this to your father, and he requested me to attend her professionally

when the family returned to London. I agreed—to him; but I had long reflection on the subject during my return journey, and had almost decided to decline, on some pretext or another.

"Hear me but a little longer. I need not dwell to you upon the event which has occurred since I left Scotland, and which has left me a free man—free to enjoy legitimately that happiness, a dream of which dawned upon me at Kilsyth, and which I shut out and put aside because it was then wrong, and almost unattainable. Circumstances are now so altered, that it is certainly not the former, and it is yet to be proved whether, so far as the young lady is concerned, it is the latter. In my desire to do right, even with the feeling of relief and release which I had, even with the hope which I do not scruple to confess I have nourished, I kept from Brook-street until a line from Miss Kilsyth summoned me thither. When you met me yesterday, I was there in obedience to her summons. You know that, I suppose, Captain Kilsyth?"

"I made inquiries yesterday, and heard so.

I said at the outset, Dr. Wilmot, that you were a man of honour. Your conduct since your return, and since the return of my family, weighed with me in the utterance of that opinion."

"I did not go to Brook-street—not that I did not fully comprehend the change in the nature of my position since I had last seen Miss Kilsyth, not that I had not a certain half-latent feeling of hope that I might, now I had the legitimate chance, be enabled to rouse an interest in her, but because I thought it was perhaps better to stay away. If I did not see her again, I preposterously attempted to argue to myself, the feeling that I had for her might die out. I *have* seen her again. I have heard from you that my feelings towards your sister are known—at least to you; and now I ask you whether you still think that, under existing circumstances, it is impossible for me to ask Miss Kilsyth to be my wife at some future date?"

As Chudleigh Wilmot stopped speaking, he bent over the back of the chair by which he had been standing during the latter part of his speech,

and looked long and earnestly at Ronald. It was very seldom that Captain Kilsyth dropped his eyes before anyone's gaze; but on this occasion he passed his hand hastily across them, and kept them for some minutes fixed upon the ground. A very hard struggle was going on in Ronald Kilsyth's mind. He was firmly persuaded that the decision he had originally taken, and which he had come to Charles-street for the purpose of insisting on with Wilmot, was the right one. And yet Wilmot's story, in itself so touching, had been so plainly and earnestly told, there was such evident honesty and candour in the man, that Ronald's heart ached to be compelled to destroy the hopes which he felt certain that his companion had recently cherished. Moreover, in saying that in considering Madeleine's future, his aspirations for her marriage took no heed of rank or wealth, Ronald simply spoke the truth. He had a slight tendency to hero-worship; and a man of Wilmot's talent, and, as he now found, of Wilmot's integrity and gentlemanly feeling, was just the person of whose friendship and alliance

he would have been proud. Madeleine too? In his own heart Ronald felt perfectly certain that Madeleine was already gratefully fond of her preserver, and would soon become as passionately attached to him as the mildness of her nature would admit; while he knew that she would not feel that she was descending from her social position—that she was "marrying beneath her," to use the ordinarily accepted phrase, in the smallest degree. And yet—no, it was impossible! He, Ronald Kilsyth, the last man in the world to care for the talk of "*on*," "they," "everybody," the social scandal, and the club chatter, while it concerned himself, shrunk from it most sensitively when it threatened anyone dear to him. Physicians were all very well—everyone knew them of course, necessarily; but their wives— Ronald was trying to recollect how many physicians' wives he had ever met in society, when he recollected that it was Madeleine, who would of course hold her own position; and—and then came a thought of Lady Muriel, and the influence which she had over his father when they were both tolerably

agreed upon the subject. It was impossible; and he must say so.

He looked up straightforwardly and honestly at his companion, and said, "I wish to God that I could give you a different answer, Dr. Wilmot; but I cannot. I still think it is impossible."

"I think so too," said Wilmot sadly. "I have looked at it, as you may imagine, from the most hopeful aspect; and even then I am compelled to confess that you are right. But, see here, Captain Kilsyth; whatever I make up my mind to I can go through with,—all save slow torture. My doom must be short and sharp—no lingering death. What I mean to say is," he continued, striving to repress the knot rising in his throat,—"what I mean to say is, that as I am to give up this hope of my life, I must quench it utterly and at once, not suffer it to smoulder and die out. You tell me—no!" he added, as Ronald put out his hand. "I do not mean you personally, believe me. I am told that I must abandon any idea of asking Miss Kilsyth to be my wife, and—and I agree. But—I must never

see Miss Kilsyth again. I could not risk the chance of meeting her here, there, and everywhere. I would not run the chance of being thrown with her again. I should do my best to hold to the line of conduct I have marked out for myself; but I am but mortal, and, as such, liable to err."

"Then, in heaven's name, what do you intend to do with yourself?" asked Ronald, with one hand plucking at his moustache, and the other hooked round the back of the chair.

"To do with myself!" echoed Wilmot. "To fly from temptation. The thing that every sensible man does when he really means to win. It is only your braggarts who stop and vaunt the excellence of their virtue, and give in after all. Read that letter, Captain Kilsyth, and you will see that I have anticipated the object of your visit."

Ronald took the letter to Sir Saville Rowe which Wilmot handed to him, and read it through carefully. The tears stood in his eyes as he handed it back.

"You're a noble fellow, Dr. Wilmot," said he; "such a gentleman as one seldom meets with. But this will never do. You must never think of giving up your practice."

"For a time at least; it is the only way. I must cure myself of a disease that has laid firm hold upon me before I can be of any use to my patients, I fancy."

"When do you purpose going?"

"At once, or within the week."

"And where?"

"I don't know. Through Germany—to Vienna, I imagine. Vienna is a great stronghold of the *savans* of our profession; and I should give out that I was bound thither on a professional mission."

"I feel as though there is nothing I would not give to dissuade you from carrying out what only half an hour since my heart was so earnestly set upon. But is it absolutely necessary that you should thus exile yourself? Could you not—"

"I can take no half measures," said Wilmot

decisively. "I go, or I stay; and we have both decided what I had better do."

Five minutes more and Ronald was gone, after a short and earnest speech of gratitude and thanks to Wilmot, in which he had said that it would be impossible ever to forget his manly chivalry, and that he hoped they would soon meet under happier auspices. He wrung Wilmot's hand at parting, and left, sensibly affected.

Wilmot's servant heard the hall-door shut behind the departing visitor, and wondered he had not been rung for. Five minutes more elapsed, ten minutes, and then the man, thinking that his master had overlooked the fact that the carriage was waiting for him, went up to the room to make the announcement. When he entered the room, he found his master with his head upon the table in front of him clasped in his hands. He looked up at the sound of the man's voice and murmured something unintelligible, seized his hat and gloves from the hall-table, and jumped into his brougham.

"He was ghastly pale when he first looked up," said the man to the female circle downstairs, "and had great red lines round his eyes. Sometimes I think he's gone off his 'ead! He's never been the same man since missus's death."

CHAPTER VI.

NOTHING LIKE WILMOT.

Mr. Foljambe did not easily throw off the painful impression which his interview with Chudleigh Wilmot had made upon him. The old gentleman had always found Wilmot, though not an expansive, a singularly frank person; he had not indeed ever spoken much to him concerning his wife or his domestic affairs generally; but men do not do so habitually; and the men to whom their wives are most dear and important rarely mention them at all. The circumstance had therefore made no impression upon Mr. Foljambe, himself a confirmed old bachelor, who, though very kind and considerate to women and children, regarded them rather as ornamental trifles, with a tendency to degenerate into nuisances, than otherwise.

He began by wondering why Wilmot should have been so thoroughly upset by his wife's death, and went on to speculate how long that very unexpected and undesirable result might be likely to last. Becoming sanguine and comparatively cheerful at this point, he made up his mind that Chudleigh would get over it before long. Perhaps all had not gone very smooth with the Wilmots. Not that he had any particular reason to think so; but Wilmot was not a remarkably domestic man, and there might be perhaps a little spice of self-reproach in his sorrow. At all events, it would not last; *that* might be looked upon as certain. In the mean time, and in order that the world might not think Wilmot's conduct silly, sentimental, or mysterious, Mr. Foljambe would be beforehand with the gossips and the curious, and, by assigning to his absence from England a motive in which the interests of his profession and those of his health should be combined, prevent the risk of its being imputed to anything so *rococo* as deep feeling.

"Gad, I'll do it," said Mr. Foljambe, as he took

his seat in his faultless brougham, having carefully completed an irreproachable afternoon toilette, in which every article of costume was integrally perfect and of the highest fashion, but as scrupulously adapted to his time of life as the dress of a Frenchwoman of middle or indeed of any age. "I'll go and inquire for that Kilsyth girl, and set the right story afloat there," he said, as he gave his coachman the necessary orders; "it will soon find its way about town, especially if that carrier-pigeon Caird is in the way."

And the old gentleman, chuckling over his own cleverness in hitting on so happy a device, felt almost reconciled already to the deprivation which he was doomed to suffer in the loss of Wilmot's society by the opportunity which it afforded him of exercising the small social talents, of which he really possessed a good many, and believed himself to be endowed with a good many more.

Lady Muriel Kilsyth was at home, likewise Miss Kilsyth; and her ladyship "received" that afternoon. So Mr. Foljambe, who, though an

admittedly old man, long past the elderly stage, and no longer *à prétention* in any sense, was as welcome a visitor in a London drawing-room as the curliest of darlings and most irresistible of guardsmen, made his way nimbly upstairs, and was ushered into the presence of the two ladies, who formed an exceedingly pretty and effective domestic group.

Madeleine Kilsyth, who had recovered her beauty, though a little of her brilliance and her bloom was still wanting, was drawing, while her step-mother stood a little behind her chair, her dark graceful head bent over her shoulder, and directed her pencil. Mr. Foljambe's glance lighted on the two faces as he entered the room, and they inspired him with an instantaneous compliment, which he turned with grace, a little old-fashioned, but the more attractive. They answered him pleasantly; Lady Muriel gave him her hand; Madeleine suffered him to take both hers, and repaid the long look of interest with which he regarded her with her sweetest smile; then resumed her occupation, and listened, as she

drew, to the conversation between Lady Muriel and Mr. Foljambe.

At first their talk was only of generalities: what the ladies had been doing since they came to London, the extent of Madeleine's drives, how many of their acquaintance had also arrived, the prospects of society for the winter, and cognate topics. They had seen a good deal of Ronald, Lady Muriel told Mr. Foljambe; and her brother's presence had been a great pleasure to Madeleine. A close observer might have thought that Madeleine's expression of countenance did not altogether confirm this statement; but her old friend was not a close observer of young ladies, and Lady Muriel did not look at her step-daughter as she spoke. After a while Mr. Foljambe turned the conversation upon Madeleine's illness, and so, in the easiest and most natural way, introduced Wilmot's name. Lady Muriel's manner of meeting this topic was admirable. She never failed in the *aplomb* which is part of the armour of a woman of the world; and though she never again could hear Wilmot's name mentioned with real

composure, she had the mock article always at hand; so skilful an imitation as successfully to defy detection.

"A fine fellow, is he not, Lady Muriel?" said Mr. Foljambe, in the tone of a father desirous of hearing the praises of his favourite son.

"Indeed he is," responded Lady Muriel heartily. "He has laid us under an obligation which we can never discharge or forget. I am sure Kilsyth and I reckon him among the most valued of our friends."

"He took the deepest interest in Miss Kilsyth's case, I know," said Mr. Foljambe; "and of course there was everything to excite such a feeling;" and the gallant old gentleman bowed in the direction of Madeleine, who acknowledged the compliment with a most becoming blush.

"It was a very anxious, a very trying time," said Lady Muriel, in the precise tone which suited the sentiment. "I don't know how Kilsyth would have borne it, had it not been for Dr. Wilmot. We were much distressed to hear that such

bad news awaited him on his return. He found his wife dying, did he not?"

"He found her dead, Lady Muriel."

There was a pause, during which Madeleine laid aside her pencil, and shaded her face with her hand. The tears were standing in her blue eyes; and while Mr. Foljambe proceeded, they streamed unchecked down her face.

"Yes, he found her dead. It was a sudden termination to an illness which had nothing serious in it, to all appearance. But, as many another illness has done, it set all human calculations at naught; and when the bad symptoms set in, it was too late for him to reach her in time. I suppose he has not told you anything about it?"

"No," said Lady Muriel; "beyond a few words of condolence, to which he made a very brief reply, nothing has been said. I fancy Dr. Wilmot is a man but little given to talking of his own affairs or his own feelings."

"Not given to talking of them at all, Lady Muriel. I never met a more reticent man, even with myself; and I flatter myself he has no closer

friend, none with whom he is on more confidential terms; he is very reserved in some things. I did not know much of his wife."

"Did you not?" said Lady Muriel; "how was that?"

"When I say I did not know much of her," Mr. Foljambe explained, "I do not mean that it was from any fault of mine. I called once or twice, but there was something sullen and impenetrable and uninteresting about her, and I never felt any real intimacy with her."

"Indeed!" said Lady Muriel, "it is impossible to know Dr. Wilmot without feeling interested in all that concerns him; and I have often wished to know what sort of woman his wife was."

"Well, that is precisely what very few persons in the world could have told you; and I, for one, acknowledge myself astonished at the effect her death has had on Wilmot."

"He is dreadfully cut up by it certainly," said Lady Muriel; "but I hope, and suppose, he will recover it, as other people have to recover troubles of that and every other kind."

"He is taking the best means of getting over it," said Mr. Foljambe; "and I heartily enter into the notion, and have encouraged him in it. He thinks of going abroad for some time. I know he has been very anxious to study the foreign treatment of diseases in general, and of fever in particular; and he came to me yesterday and told me he meant to leave London for six months at least. He assigned sound reasons for such a determination, and I think it is the wisest at which he could possibly have arrived."

Lady Muriel rose and rang the bell. The fire required mending, and the brief afternoon twilight rendered the lamps a necessity earlier than usual. When these things had been attended to, she took up the dialogue where it had been broken off with all her accustomed grace and skill.

"I did not know we were about to lose Dr. Wilmot for a time," she said. "If all his friends and patients miss him as much as Madeleine Kilsyth and myself are likely to do, his absence is likely to create a sensation indeed. And so

poor Mrs. Wilmot was not a very amiable woman?"

Mr. Foljambe had not said anything about Mrs. Wilmot's amiability, or the opposite, but he let the observation pass in sheer bewilderment; and that Lady Muriel Kilsyth understood as well as he did. She went on. "A man like Dr. Wilmot must miss companionship at home very much. Of course he can always command the resources of society, but they would not be welcome to him yet awhile. How long does he speak of remaining away, Mr. Foljambe?"

"He did not mention any particular time in talking the matter over with me. His destination is Berlin, I believe. He is anxious to investigate some medical system carried on there, which I need not say neither you nor I know anything about. He was very eloquent upon it, I assure you; and I am glad to perceive that all his trouble has not decreased his interest in the one great object of his life."

"His professional advancement, I suppose?" said Lady Muriel.

"Well, not exactly that. I think he must retard that by any, and especially by an indefinite, absence. It is rather to his profession itself, to science in the abstract, I allude. He always had a perfect thirst for knowledge, and the greatest powers of application I have ever known any man possessed of. A 'case' was in his eyes the most important of human affairs. He would throw himself into the interest of his attendance upon a patient with preternatural energy. I am sure you discovered that while he was at Kilsyth."

"Yes indeed; his care of Madeleine was beyond all praise, or indeed description. No doubt, had any other opportunity offered, we should have found, as you say, that such devotion was not a solitary instance."

"O no, Wilmot is always the same. You know, I presume, that I required his services very urgently indeed just then; but he would not leave Miss Kilsyth's case for even so old and near a friend as I am."

Madeleine's colour deepened, and she listened

to the conversation, in which she had taken no share, with increased eagerness.

"I know that someone telegraphed to him, but that he kindly said Madeleine's case being the more urgent of the two, he would remain with her. And you were none the worse, it seems, Mr. Foljambe?"

"No indeed, Lady Muriel," replied the old gentleman with a good-humoured smile. "Wilmot's deputy did quite as well for me as the mighty potentate of medicine himself. But I acknowledge I was a little annoyed; and if anyone but my old friend Kilsyth's daughter had been the detaining cause, I should have been tempted to play Wilmot a trick, by pretending that some extraordinary and entirely novel symptoms had appeared. He would have come fast enough then, I warrant you, for the chance of finding out something new about gout."

Lady Muriel laughed, but Madeleine apparently did not perceive the joke. Soon some other callers dropped in, and Mr. Foljambe took his leave. But the subject of Wilmot and his con-

templated abandonment of London was not abandoned on his departure. He was well known to the "set" in which the Kilsyths moved, though their own acquaintance with him was so recent, and everyone had something to say about the rising man. The sentimental view of the subject was very general. It was so very charming to think of any man, especially one so talented, so popular, so altogether delightful as Wilmot, being "broken-hearted" by the death of his wife. Lady Muriel gently insinuated, once or twice, a doubt whether there was any ground for this very congenial but rather romantic supposition: her doubts, however, were by no means well received, and she found herself overwhelmed with evidence of the irremediably desolate condition of Wilmot's heart.

When the afternoon calls had come to an end, and Lady Muriel and her step-daughter were in their respective rooms and about to dress for dinner, the mind of each was in accord with that of the other, inasmuch as the same subject of contemplation engrossed both. But the harmony went

no farther. Nothing could be more opposite than the effect produced upon Madeleine and Lady Muriel by Mr. Foljambe's news, and by all the desultory discussion and speculation which had followed its announcement.

To Madeleine the knowledge that she should see Wilmot no more for an indefinite period was like a sentence of death. The young girl was profoundly unconscious of the meaning of her own feelings. That the sentiment which she entertained towards Wilmot was love, she never for a moment dreamed. In him the ideal of an elevated and refined fancy had found its realisation; he was altogether different from the men she had hitherto met since her emancipation from the schoolroom; different from the hunting, shooting devotees of field-sports, or the heavy country gentlemen given to farming and local politics, who frequented Kilsyth; different from the associates of her brother, who, whether they were merely fashionable and empty, or formal and priggish like Ronald himself, were essentially distasteful to her. She was of a dreamy and romantic tempera-

ment, to which the delicacy of health and the not quite congenial conditions of her life at home contributed not a little; and she had seen in Wilmot the man of talent, action, and resolve, the realisation of the nineteenth-century heroic ideal. To admire and reverence him; to find the best and most valuable of resources in his friendship, the wisest and truest guidance in his intellect, the most exquisite of pleasures in his society; to triumph in his fame, and try to merit his approval,—such was the girl's scheme for the future. But it never occurred to her that there was one comprehensive and forbidden word in which the whole of this state of feeling might be accurately defined. She had grieved for Wilmot's grief when she heard of the death of his wife, but at the same time a subtle instinct, which she never questioned and could not have defined, told her that his marriage had not been a happy one, according to her enthusiastic girlish notion of a happy marriage. She did not know anything about it; she had no idea what sort of woman Chudleigh Wilmot's wife was, but she had felt, by the nameless sense which,

had she been an elder woman with ever so little experience, would have enlightened her as to the nature of her own feelings, that he was not really attached to her to the extent which alone seemed to her to imply happiness in the conjugal relation. So, when Madeleine heard that Wilmot was going abroad, and heard her stepmother's visitors talk about his being "broken-hearted," she felt equally wretched and incredulous. Sentimental reason for this resolution she did not, she could not accept; the other was exquisitely painful to her. Had he, indeed, so absorbing a love for his professional studies? Was he really occupied by them to the exclusion of all else; had her "case," and not herself, been his attraction at Kilsyth? If Mr. Foljambe had really resorted to the device he had spoken of, would Wilmot have left her? To none of these questions could Madeleine find an answer inside her own breast, or without it; so they tortured her. Her vision of seeing him frequently, of making him her friend —the vision which had so strangely beautified the prospect of her stay in London,—faded suddenly;

and unconscious of all the idea meant and implied, the girl said to herself, "If he had cared for me—not as I care for him, of course that could not be—but ever so little, he would not go away."

Very different were Lady Muriel's meditations. To her this resolve on the part of Wilmot was peculiarly welcome. In the first place, she was a thorough woman of the world, and free from the impetuosity of youth. She was quite willing to be deprived of Wilmot's society for the present, if, as she calculated would be the case, he should return under circumstances which would enable her to reckon with increased security upon gaining the influence over him to which she ardently aspired, to which she aspired more and more ardently as each day proved to her how strong an impulse her life had taken from this new source. She cared little from what motive Wilmot's resolve had sprung. If indeed he had deeply loved, and if indeed he did desperately mourn his wife, the very power and violence of the feeling would react upon itself, and force him to accept consolation all the sooner that he had proved the

greatness of his need of it. He would be absent during the dark time when grief forms an eclipse, and he would emerge from its shadow into the brightness which she would cause to shine upon his life. She did not anticipate that his absence would be greatly prolonged, but she did not shrink, even supposing it should be, from the interval. She had enough to do within its duration. Lady Muriel was as thoroughly acquainted with Madeleine's love for Wilmot as the girl was ignorant that she loved him. There was not a corner of her innocent heart which the keen experienced eye of her step-mother had not scanned and examined narrowly.

In Madeleine's perfect ignorance of the real nature of her own feelings Lady Muriel's best security for the success of her wishes and designs lay. As she had no notion that her love was aught but liking, she would be the more easily persuaded that her liking was love. She had a liking for Ramsay Caird. The gay, careless, superficial good-nature of the young man, his easy gentlemanly manners, and the familiarity

with which his intercourse with the Kilsyth family was invested in consequence of his relationship to Lady Muriel, were all pleasing to the young girl; and probably, "next to Ronald," she preferred Ramsay Caird to any man of her acquaintance. Of late, too, an unexplained something had come between Madeleine and her brother — a certain restraint, a subtle sense of estrangement—which Lady Muriel thoroughly understood, but for which Madeleine could not have accounted, and shrunk from acknowledging to herself. This unexplained something, which made her look forward to Ronald's visits with greatly decreased pleasure, and made her involuntarily silent and depressed in his presence, told considerably in Ramsay Caird's favour; for it led to Madeleine's according him an increased share of her attention. The young man was a constant visitor at the Kilsyths'; and there was so much decision in Madeleine's liking for him, that she missed him if by any chance he was absent of an evening, and occasionally was heard to wonder what could have kept Mr. Caird away.

Madeleine's delicate health furnished Lady Muriel with a sufficient and reasonable pretext for keeping her at home in the evenings; and she contrived to make it evident that Ramsay Caird's presence constituted a material difference in the dulness or the pleasantness of the little party which assembled with tolerable regularity in the drawing-room. Ronald would come in for an hour or so, and then Madeleine would be particularly *prévenante* towards Ramsay Caird; an innocent and unconscious hypocrisy, poor child, which her step-mother perfectly understood, and which she saw with deep though concealed satisfaction.

On the evening of the day when Mr. Foljambe had discussed Wilmot's departure with Lady Muriel and Madeleine, the elder lady was a little embarrassed by the manifest effect on the looks and the spirits of the younger which the intelligence had produced. At dinner Kilsyth perversely chose to descant on the two themes with all a single-minded man's amiable pertinacity, and, of course, without the smallest conception that any

connection existed between them. He was quite aggrieved at Wilmot's departure, and called on everyone to take notice of Madeleine's looks in confirmation of the loss he and his in particular must sustain by his absence. Ronald was of the party; and he preserved so marked and ungracious a silence, that at length even Kilsyth could not avoid noticing it, and said:

"I suppose you are the only man who knows him, Ronald, who underrates Wilmot; and I really believe you think we make quite an unnecessary fuss about him."

"I by no means underrate the abilities of your medical attendant, sir," Ronald answered in his coldest and driest tone, and, as Madeleine felt in all her shrinking nerves, though she dared not look up to meet it, with a moody searching glance at her; "but, admirable as he may be in his proper capacity and his proper place, I cannot quite appreciate his social importance."

"Just listen to him, Muriel," said Kilsyth in a provoked but yet good-humoured tone. "What wonderful fellows these young men are! He

actually talks of a man like Wilmot as if he were a general practitioner or an apothecary's apprentice!"

Lady Muriel interposed, and turned off this somewhat perilous and peace-breaking remark with one of the graceful, skilful generalities of which she always had a supply ready for emergencies. Ronald contented himself with a half smile of contempt at his father's enthusiastic misrepresentation; Madeleine talked energetically to Ramsay Caird; and the matter dropped.

To be resumed in the drawing-room, however. Madeleine's looks were not improved when her father and the two young men joined her and Lady Muriel. She was dreaming over a book which she was pretending to read, when Kilsyth came up to her, took her chin in his hand, and turned up her face to his and to the light.

Tears were trembling in her blue eyes.

"Hallo, Maddy," said her father, "what's this? You're nervous, my darling! I knew you were not well. Has anything fretted you?—Has anything vexed her, Muriel?"

"No, papa, nothing; nothing at all," said Madeleine, making a strong effort to recover herself. "I have got hold of a sorrowful book, that's all."

"Have you, my dear? then put it away. Let's look at it. Why, it's *Pickwick*, I declare! Maddy, what can ail you? How could you possibly cry over anything in *Pickwick?*"

"I don't know that, sir," said Ramsay, jantily and jovially coming to Madeleine's assistance, without the faintest notion of anything beyond her being "badgered by the governor." "There's the dying clown, you know, and the queer client. I've cried over them myself; or at least I've been very near it." And he sat down beside Madeleine, and applied himself with success to rousing and amusing her. Ronald said nothing, and very soon went away.

"I'm determined on one thing, Muriel," said Kilsyth to his wife when they were alone; "I'll have a long talk with Wilmot before he goes, and get the fullest instructions from him about Madeleine. I have no confidence in any-

one else in her case, and I'll write to Wilmot about it, and ask him to come here professionally, as soon as he can, the first thing to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER TURN OF THE SCREW.

If the interview which had taken place between Chudleigh Wilmot and Henrietta Prendergast had had unfortunate results for the one, it had been proportionably, if not equally, unpleasant to the other. It was impossible that Henrietta could have sustained a more complete discouragement, a more telling and unmistakable defeat, than she felt had befallen her when, after Wilmot had left her, she went over every point of their conversation, and considered the interview in every possible aspect. She had at once, or at least at a very early stage, discerned that some fresh disturbing cause existed in Wilmot's mind. She had seen him, on the memorable occasion of their first interview after his wife's death, horrified, confounded, and unfeignedly distressed. How-

ever little he had loved his wife, however passing and shallow the impression made upon him by the sudden and untimely event might prove—and Mrs. Prendergast was prepared to find it prove shallow and passing—it had been real, single, intelligible. He had received the painful communication which she had been charged to make to him with surprise, with sorrow — no doubt, in his secret soul, with bitter, regretful, vain remorse. She could only surmise this part of his feelings. He had not departed from the manly reticence which she had expected from him, and for which she admired him; but she never doubted that he had experienced such remorse, —vain, bitter, and regretful.

All the information which had drifted to her knowledge since — and though she was not a distinctly curious or mean-natured woman, Mrs. Prendergast was not above cultivating and maintaining friendly relations with Dr. Wilmot's household, to all of whom she was as well known, and had been nearly as important, as their late mistress — had confirmed her in the belief that the

conduct of the suddenly-bereaved husband had been all that propriety, good feeling, good taste, and good sense could possibly require. She had not precisely defined in her imagination what it was that she looked for and expected in the interview which Wilmot had requested, with a little too much formality, certainly, to be reassuring with regard to any notions she might possibly have entertained with respect to the freedom and intimacy of their future relations. But she did not suffer herself to dwell on that matter of the formality. It was not unnatural; there are persons, she knew, to whom that sort of thing seems proper when a death—what may be called an intimate death, that is to say—has taken place, who change all their ways and manners for a time, just as they put on mourning and use lugubrious stationery. It was not very like what she would have expected of Wilmot, to enrol himself in the number of these formalists; but she did not allow the circumstance to impress her disagreeably. She possessed patience in as marked a degree as she possessed intelligence—patience,

a much rarer and nearly as valuable a quality —and she was satisfied to wait until time should enable her to arrive at the free and frequent association with Wilmot, which was the first step to the end she had in view, and meant to keep in view. She was perfectly clear upon that point; none the less clear that she did not discuss it in her own thoughts, or ponder over it; but she laid it quietly aside, to be produced and acted on when it should be required.

Therefore Henrietta Prendergast was disquieted and disconcerted by the tone and manner which Wilmot had assumed during their interview. Disquieted, because there was something in and under them which she could not fathom; disconcerted, because everything in the interview betrayed and disappointed the expectations she had formed, and because her intention of conveying to Wilmot, by a frank and friendly manner, that it was within his power to continue in his own person the intimacy which had subsisted between herself and his wife, had been utterly routed and nullified.

"There was something in his mind with regard to Mabel," she said to herself, as she sat at her tea in her snug drawing-room on the same afternoon; "there certainly was something in his mind about her which was not in it when I saw him last. I wonder what it is. I wonder whether he has found anything? I am sure she never kept a journal; I shouldn't think so; I fancy no one ever does in real life, except they are so important as to be wanted for public purposes, or so vain as to think such demand likely. Besides, Mabel's trouble was not tragical; it was only monotonous and uneventful. No; I am sure she did not keep a journal. So he has not found one; and he has not found any letters either. Mabel had very few to keep, and she burnt the scanty collection just as her illness began. I remember coming suddenly into the room, and fluttering the ashes all over her bed and toilet-table by opening the door. Yes, to be sure, the window was open; and she had had a fire kindled on purpose."

Mrs. Prendergast leaned her face upon her

hand, struck her teaspoon thoughtfully against the edge of the tea-tray, and pondered deeply. She was trying to recall every little incident connected with the dead woman, in the endeavour to discover the secret of Wilmot's demeanour that day.

"Yes, she was sitting by the fire; a sandal-wood box was on the floor, and a heap of ashes in the grate. I remember looking rather surprised, and she said, 'You know, Hettie, one never can tell what may happen. You nor I either cannot tell whether I shall ever recover; and it is well to have all things in readiness.' I thought the observation rather absurd particularly, however true it might be generally, and told her so, for she was by no means seriously ill then. She still persisted, however. What a remarkable feature of poor Mabel's illness, by the bye, was her persistent and unalterable belief that she should die! The wish to die, no doubt, assisted it much at the end; but the conviction laid hold on her from the first."

Then Mrs. Prendergast remembered how Mrs. Wilmot had left everything in readiness; every

article of household property, all her own private possessions, everything which had claimed her care, provided for; and though she knew that instances of such a morbid state of mind were not altogether wanting in the case of women in Mrs. Wilmot's state of health, she did not feel that such an hypothesis accounted for this particular case satisfactorily. In all other respects there had been such equality of disposition, common sense, and absence of fancifulness about her friend, that she could not accept the explanation which suggested itself. This was not the first time that she had thought over this circumstance. It had been brought before her very forcibly when a packet was sent to her, with a kind but formal note from Wilmot, a day or two after his wife's funeral; which packet contained a few articles of jewelry and general ornament, and a strip of paper, bearing merely the words: "I wish these to be given to Mrs. Prendergast.—M. W."

But now it assumed a more puzzling importance and deeper interest. Had Wilmot found any-

thing among all her orderly possessions which had thrown any new light upon her life? Had he had a misunderstanding with Dr. Whittaker? Did he think his wife's life had been sacrificed by want of care, or want of attention or of skill? Had remorse seized him on this account, when he had succeeded in defeating its attack, in consequence of the revelation which she had made to him? Had he regained incredulity or indifference as regarded the years which had passed in miscomprehension, to be roused into inquietude and stern self-reproach by an appeal to his master passion, his professional knowledge and attainments? If this were so, there would at least be some measure of punishment allotted to Chudleigh Wilmot; for he was a proud man, and sensitive on that point, if not on any other.

Henrietta Prendergast was well disposed towards Wilmot now, in the new aspect of affairs, and contemplating as she did certain dim future possibilities very grateful to her pertinacious disposition. But she was not sorry to think that he had something to suffer; and that something of

a nature to oppress his spirits considerably, and render him indifferent to the attractions of society. Before this desirable effect should have worn off, she would have contrived to make herself necessary to him. She had but little doubt of her power to accomplish this, if only the opportunity were afforded her. She knew she had plenty of ability, not of a kind which Wilmot would dislike, and certainly of a quality for which he did not give her credit. She had less attraction than Mabel, so far as good looks would go, but that would not be very far, she thought, with Dr. Wilmot. He might never care for her even so much as he had cared for Mabel; but his feelings towards her, if evoked at all, would be different, much more satisfactory, and to her mind, which was properly organised, quite sufficient.

If Henrietta's day-dreams were of a more sober colour, they were no less unreal than the rosiest and most extravagant vision ever woven by youthful fancy. She had not seen Madeleine Kilsyth. She had indeed understood and witnessed Mabel's jealousy, aroused by the devotion of her

hnsband to the young Scotch girl. But she thought little of danger from this quarter. She had always understood—having a larger intellect and a wider perception, and above all, being an unconcerned spectator, uninjured by it in her affections or her rights—Wilmot's absorption in his profession much better than his wife had understood it. Something in her own nature, dim and undeveloped, answered to this absorption.

"If I had had any pursuit in life, I should have followed it just as eagerly; if I had had a career, I should have devoted myself to it just as entirely," had been her frequent mental comment upon Wilmot's conduct. She quite understood the effect it produced on a woman of Mabel's temperament, was perfectly convinced that it could not produce a similar effect on a woman of her own; but also believed that no such conduct would ever have been pursued towards her. The very something which enabled her to sympathise with him would have secured her from exclusion from the reality and the meaning of his life. "At least I should interest him," she

had often said to herself, when she had seen how entirely Mabel failed to inspire him with interest; and in her lengthened cogitations on the evening of the day which had been marked by Wilmot's visit, she repeated the assurance with renewed conviction.

It was not that the remembrance of Miss Kilsyth did not occur to her very strongly; on the contrary, it occupied its full share of her mind and attention. But she disposed of the subject very comfortably and finally by dwelling on the following points:

First, the distinction of rank and the difference in age between Miss Kilsyth and Dr. Wilmot were both considerable, important, and likely to form very efficient barriers against any extravagant notions on his part. Supposing—an unlikely supposition in the case of a man who added remarkable good sense to exceptional talent—he were to overlook this distinction of rank and difference of age, it was not probable that the young lady's relatives would accommodate themselves to any such blindness; while it was ex-

tremely probable they would regard any project on his part with respect to her as unmitigated presumption.

So far she had pursued her cogitations without regard to the young girl herself—to this brilliant young beauty, upon whom, endowed with youth, beauty, rank, the prestige of one of the most fashionable and popular women in London (for Henrietta Prendergast had her relations with the great world, though she was not of it), life was just opening in the fulness of joy and splendour. But when she turned her attention in that direction, she found nothing to discourage her, nothing to fear. What could be more wildly improbable than that Chudleigh Wilmot should have made any impression on Miss Kilsyth of a nature to lead to the realisation of any hope which might suggest itself to the new-made widower? Henrietta Prendergast was not a woman of much delicacy of mind or refinement of sentiment—if she had been, such self-communing as that of this evening would have been impossible within three weeks of her friend's death—but she

was not so coarse, or indeed so ignorant of the nature and training of women like Madeleine Kilsyth, as to conceive the possibility of the girl's having fallen in love with a married man, even had that married man been of a far more captivating type than that presented by Chudleigh Wilmot. Madeleine's step-mother had not been restrained from such a suspicion by any superfluous delicacy; but Lady Muriel had an incentive to clear-sightedness which was wanting in Henrietta's case; and it must be said in justification of the acute woman of the world, that she was satisfied of the girl's perfect unconsciousness of the real nature of the sentiment which her jealous quick-sightedness had detected almost in the first hours of its existence.

The disqualification of his marriage removed, Henrietta still thought there could be nothing to dread. The reminiscences attached to the doctor who had attended her through a long illness, was said to have saved her life, and had made himself very agreeable to his patient, were no doubt frankly kind and grateful; but they were very

unlikely to be sentimental, and the opportunities which might come in his way for rendering the tie already established stronger would be probably limited. "If anything were to be feared in that quarter," thought Henrietta, "and one could only manage to get a hint conveyed to Lady Muriel, the thing would be done at once."

Henrietta pronounced this opinion in her own mind with perfect confidence. And she was right. If Lady Muriel Kilsyth had had no more interest in Wilmot than that which during his sojourn at Kilsyth he might have inspired in the least important inmate of the house, she would have acted precisely as she had done. This was her strong tower of defence, her excuse, her justification. If Wilmot's admiration of her step-daughter had not had in it the least element of offence to herself, she would at once have opposed it, have endeavoured to prevent its growth and manifestation, just as assiduously as she had done. Herein was her safety. So, though Henrietta Prendergast was entirely unaware of anything that had taken place; though she had never spoken to

Lady Muriel in her life, she had, as it happened, speculated upon her quite correctly. So her self-conference came to a close, without any misgiving, discouragement, or hesitation.

"Mabel knew some people who knew the Kilsyths," Henrietta Prendergast had said to Wilmot in their first interview; but she had not mentioned that the people who knew the Kilsyths were acquaintances of hers, and that she had been present on the occasion when Mabel had acquired all the information which she had taken to heart so keenly. Such was, however, the case; and Henrietta made up her mind, when she had reasoned herself out of the first feeling of discouragement which her interview with Wilmot had caused, though not out of the conviction that there was something in his mind which she had not been able to come at, that she would call on Mrs. and Miss Charlwood without delay. She might not learn anything about Wilmot by so doing, but she could easily introduce the Kilsyths into the conversation; and it could not fail to be useful to her to gain a clear insight into what

sort of people they were, and especially to know whether Miss Kilsyth had any declared or supposed admirers as yet. So she went to bed that night with her mind tolerably easy on the whole, though her last waking thought was of the strange something in Chudleigh Wilmot's manner which she had not been able to penetrate.

It chanced, however, that Mrs. Prendergast did not fulfil her intention so soon as she had purposed. On awaking the following morning, she found that she had taken cold, a rather severe cold. She was habitually careful of her health, and as the business on which she had intended to go out was not pressing, she thought it wiser to remain at home. The next day she was no better; the day after a little worse. On the fourth day she thought she should be justified in asking Wilmot to give her a call. On the very rare occasions when she had required medical attendance she had had recourse to her friend's husband; and it occurred to her that the present opportunity was favourable for impressing him with a sense that she desired to maintain the former relation

unbroken. To increase and intensify it would be her business later.

So Mrs. Prendergast sent for Dr. Wilmot; but in answer to the summons Dr. Whittaker presented himself.

They had not met since they had stood together by Mabel's deathbed, and the recollection softened Henrietta, though she felt at once surprised and angry at the substitution.

"I am doing Wilmot's work, except in the very particular cases," Dr. Whittaker explained.

"Indeed! Then Dr. Wilmot knew, in some strange way, that mine was not a particular case!" Henrietta answered, with an exhibition of pique as unusual in her as it was unflattering to Dr. Whittaker.

"My dear Mrs. Prendergast," expostulated the doctor mildly, "your note—I saw it in the regular way of business—said 'merely a cold;' and Wilmot and I both know you always say what you mean—no more and no less."

Henrietta smiled rather grimly as she replied, "I must say, you are adroit in turning a slight

into a compliment. And now we will talk about my cold."

They did talk about her cold, and Dr. Whittaker duly prescribed for it, emphatically forbidding exposure to the weather. Just as he rose to take leave, Henrietta asked him what sort of spirits Wilmot appeared to be in.

"Very low indeed," said Dr. Whittaker; "but I think the change of air will do him good."

The change was likely to be sufficiently profitable to Dr. Whittaker to make it only natural that he should regard it with warm approbation, without reflecting very severely upon his sincerity either; he was but human, and not particularly prosperous.

"What change?" asked Henrietta in a tone which had not all the indifference which she had desired to lend it. (Dr. Whittaker had seen and guessed enough to make it just that he should not look for much warmth from Mabel's friend in speaking of Mabel's husband; and Mrs. Prendergast never overlooked the relative positions in any situation.)

"What! don't you know, then? He is going abroad—going to Paris, and then to Berlin, partly to recruit, and partly to inquire into some new theory about fever they've got there. I don't generally think much of their theories myself, especially in Berlin."

But Dr. Whittaker's opinions had no interest for Henrietta. His news occupied her. She did not altogether like this move. She did not believe in either of the reasons assigned; she felt certain there was something behind them both, and that that something had been in Wilmot's mind when she last saw him. What was it? Was he flying from a memory or a presence? If the former, then something more than she was in possession of had come to his knowledge concerning Mabel; for much as he had been shocked, and intensely as he had felt all she had told him, Henrietta knew Wilmot too well to believe for a moment that the present resolution was to be traced to that source. If the latter, the presence must be that of Miss Kilsyth; and there must be dangers in her way, complications in this matter,

she did not understand, some grave error in her calculation. True, he might be flying away in despair; but that could hardly be. In so short a interval of time it was impossible he could have dared or even tried his fate. It was the unexpectedness of this occurrence that gave it so much power to trouble Henrietta. She had made a careful calculation; but this was outside it, and it puzzled her. She took leave of Dr. Whittaker, while these and many more equally distracting thoughts passed through her mind, in a sufficiently absent manner, and listened to his expression of a sanguine hope of finding her much better on the morrow through a sedulous observance of his advice, with as much indifference as though he had been talking about somebody else's cold. When he had left her, she sat still for a while; then put on her warmest attire, sent for a cab, and, utterly regardless of Dr. Whittaker's prohibition, drove straight to Mrs. Charlton's house in South-street, Park-lane.

Mrs. Prendergast's cab drew up behind a carriage which had just stopped before Mrs. Charlton's

door, at that moment opened in reply to the defiant summons of the footman, who was none other than one of the ambrosial Mercuries in attendance on Lady Muriel Kilsyth. An elderly lady, rather oddly dressed, descended from the equipage, bestowed a familiar nod upon its remaining occupant from the steps, and walked into the house. Mrs. Prendergast was then admitted; and as the carriage which made way for her was displaced, she recognised in the face of the lady who sat in it Lady Muriel Kilsyth.

"That is very odd," she thought; "I wonder who she has set down here, and why she has not come in herself."

Immediately afterwards she was exchanging the customary *fadeurs* with Mrs. Charlton, and had been presented by that lady to Mrs. M'Diarmid.

Wonderfully voluble was Mrs. M'Diarmid, to be sure, and communicative to a degree which, if her audience did not happen to be vehemently interested in the matter of her discourse, must have been occasionally a little overpowering and wearisome. Mrs. M'Diarmid, being at present

staying with the Kilsyths, could not talk of anything but the Kilsyths; a state of things rather distressing to Mrs. Charlton, who was an eminently well-bred person, and perfectly aware that Mrs. Prendergast was not acquainted with the people under discussion. But to arrest Mrs. M'Diarmid in the full tide of her discourse was a feat which a few adventurous spirits had indeed attempted, but in which no one had ever succeeded. Mrs. Charlton's was not an adventurous spirit; she merely suffered, and was not strong, but derived sensible consolation after a while from observing that Mrs. Prendergast either had the tact and the manners to assume an aspect of perfect contentment, or really did feel an interest in the affairs of strangers, which to her, Mrs. Charlton, was inexplicable. She had much regard for Henrietta, and considerable respect for her intellect; so she preferred the former hypothesis, and adopted it.

"And she told me to tell you how sorry she was she could not possibly come in to-day; but she had to fetch Kilsyth at his club, and then go

home and dress for a ride with him, and send the carriage for me. I must run away the moment it comes, and get back to Maddy." This, after Mrs. M'Diarmid had run on uninterruptedly for about a quarter of an hour, with details of every kind concerning the house and the servants, the health, spirits, employments, and engagements of the family.

"Miss Kilsyth is still delicate, I think you said?" Mrs. Charlton at length contrived to say.

"Yes, indeed, very delicate. My dear, the child mopes—she really mopes; and I can't bear to see young people moping, though it seems the fashion nowadays for all the young people to think themselves not only wiser but sadder than their elders. Just to see Ronald beside his father, my dear! The difference! And to think he'll be Kilsyth of Kilsyth some day; and what will the poor people do then? He'll make them go to school, and have 'em drilled, I'm sure he will; not that he is not a fine young man, my dear, and a good one—we must all admit that; but he is not like his father, and never will be—never. And,

for my part, I don't wonder Maddy's afraid of him, for I am sure I am."

"But I thought Miss Kilsyth and her brother were so particularly attached to each other," said Mrs. Charlton, yielding at length to the temptation to gossip.

"So they are, so they are.—I'm sure, Mrs. Prendergast," said Mrs. M'Diarmid, turning to Henrietta, "a better brother than Ronald Kilsyth never lived; but then he *is* dictatorial, I *must* say that; and he never will believe or remember that Madeleine is not a child now, and that it is absurd and useless to treat a woman just as one would treat a child. He makes such a fuss about everyone Maddy sees, and everywhere she goes to, and is positively disagreeable about anyone she seems to fancy."

"Well," said Mrs. Charlton, "but I'm not sure that he is wrong to be particular about his sister's fancies. The fancies of a young lady of Miss Kilsyth's beauty and pretensions are not trifling matters. Has she any *very* strongly pronounced?"

"Bless your heart, no!" exclaimed Mrs. M'Diarmid, her vulgarity evoked by her earnestness. "The girl is fonder of himself and her father than of anyone in the world, and I really don't think she ever had a thought hid from them. But Ronald *will* interfere so; he bothered about the silliness of young ladies' correspondence until he worried her into giving up writing to Bessy Ravenshaw; and he lectured for ten minutes because she wrote to poor Dr. Wilmot on her own account."

"How very absurd!" said Mrs. Charlton; "he had better take care he does not worry her by excess of brotherly love and authority into finding her home so unbearable, that she may make a wretched hurried marriage in order to get away from it. Such things *have* been;" and Mrs. Charlton sighed, as if she spoke from some close experience of "such things."

"Very true, very true—I am sure I often wish the poor dear child was well married. I must say for Lady Muriel, I think she is an admirable step-mother. It is such a difficult position,

Mrs. Prendergast, so invidious; still, you know, it never can be exactly the same thing; and then, you know, there are the little girls to grow up, and there will be the natural jealousy—about Maddy's fortune, you know; and altogether *I do* think it would be very nice."

"I should think a good many others think it would be very nice also," said Mrs. Charlton.

"Well, I don't know—it is hard to say—young men are so different nowadays from what they were in my time; they seem to be afraid of marrying. I really don't think Maddy has ever had an offer."

"Depend on it that story will soon be changed. She is, to my knowledge, immensely admired. Her illness made quite a sensation, and the romantic story of the famous Dr. Wilmot's devotion to the patient."

"I think you should say to the *case*," struck in Henrietta. "I know Dr. Wilmot very well, and I can fancy any amount of devotion to the fever and its cure; but Wilmot devoted to a patient I cannot understand."

Something in her voice and manner conveyed an unpleasant impression to both her hearers. Mrs. Charlton looked calmly surprised; Mrs. M'Diarmid looked distressed and rather angry. She wished she had been more cautious in telling of the Kilsyths before this lady, who did not know them, but who did know Dr. Wilmot. She felt that Mrs. Prendergast had put a meaning into what Mrs. Charlton had said, in which there was something at least indirectly slighting and derogatory to Madeleine; and the feeling made her hot and angry. Mrs. Charlton's suavity extricated them from the difficulty, which all felt, and one intended.

"I didn't quite understand the distinction," she said; "of course I understand it as you put it, but mine was merely a *façon de parler*. Dr. Wilmot's devotion to his profession has long been known, and he has succeeded as such devotion deserves."

"Yes, indeed, Mrs. Charlton," said Henrietta heartily, and slipping with infinite ease into the peculiar manner which implies such intimacy with

the person complimented as to make the praise almost a personal favour. "He has paid dearly indeed for his devotion, in the very instance you mention, Mrs. M'Diarmid."

"How so?" said Mrs. M'Diarmid, off her guard, and rather huffily.

"Ah, poor fellow! I can hardly bear to talk of it; but as I was his poor wife's closest friend, and with her when she died, I think it is only fair and just to him to tell the truth. Of course he had no notion of his wife's danger—no one could have had; but he never can or will forgive himself for his absence from her. You will not wonder that he should feel it dreadfully, and that his self-reproach is intolerable. 'I suppose,' he said, in one of his worst fits of grief, 'people will think I stayed at Kilsyth because Kilsyth is a great man; but you, Henrietta, you know me better. If she had been his dairymaid, instead of his daughter, it would have been all one to me.' And that was perfectly true; he knows no distinction in the pursuit of his duties. It was a terrible coincidence; but nothing can persuade him to regard it merely

as a coincidence. It is fortunate your young friend is restored to health, Mrs. M'Diarmid."

"Yes," said that lady, now pale, and looking the image of disconcerted distress.

"Fortunate for her, of course; but also fortunate for him. You will excuse my telling you, of course; nothing in the whole matter reflects in the least on the Kilsyth family—and I cannot forbear from saying what must exalt him still more in your esteem, but you cannot conceive how painful to him any reference to that fatal time is. He has wonderful self-control and firmness; but they were severely taxed, I assure you, when he had to make a call on Lady Muriel and Miss Kilsyth. I daresay he didn't show it."

"Not in the least," said Mrs. M'Diarmid.

"O no; he is essentially a strong man. But he suffered. You would know how much, if you had seen him when he had finally made up his mind to go abroad, and get out of the remembrance of it all, so far as he could. Poor Miss Kilsyth! one pities a young girl to have been even the perfectly innocent cause of such a calamity to

any man, and especially to one who rendered her such a service. However, people who talk about it now will have forgotten it all long before he comes back."

At this juncture Miss Charlton entered the room and warmly greeted Henrietta. Mrs. Prendergast was an authority in the art of illuminating, to which Miss Charlton devoted her harmless life.

Presently Lady Muriel's carriage came for Mrs. M'Diarmid, and that good woman went away, and might have been heard to say many times during the silent drive :

"My poor Maddy! my poor dear child!"

Chudleigh Wilmot had entertained, it has been seen, vague fears that Mrs. Prendergast might talk about him ; but of all possible shapes they had never taken this one.

CHAPTER VIII.

A COUP MANQUÉ.

It has been said that Mrs. M'Diarmid took an earnest motherly interest in Madeleine Kilsyth; but the bare statement is by no means sufficient to explain the real feelings entertained towards the somewhat forlorn motherless girl by the brisk energetic vulgar little woman of the world, who was her connection by marriage. Such affections spring up in many female breasts which, to all outward appearance, are most unpromising soil; they need no cultivation, no looking after, no watering with the tears of sympathy or gratitude, no raking or hoeing or binding up. They are ruthlessly lopped off in their tenderest shoots; but they grow again, and twine away round the "object" as parasitically as ever. Mrs. M'Diarmid's regard for Madeleine was quite of the parasitical type, in its best sense, be it always understood.

She loved the young girl with all her heart and soul, and would as soon have dreamed of inspiring as of "carneying" her, as she expressed it. Her love for Madeleine was pure and simple and unaffected, deep-seated, and capable of producing great results; but it was of the "poor-dear" school, after all.

Nothing, for instance, could persuade Mrs. M'Diarmid that Madeleine was not very much to be pitied in every act and circumstance of her life. The fact of having a step-mother was in itself a burden sufficient to break the spirit of any ordinarily-constituted young woman, according to Mrs. Mac's idea. Not but that Mrs. Mac and Lady Muriel "got on very well together," according to the former lady's phraseology; not but that Lady M. (whom she was usually accustomed to speak of, when extra emphasis was required, as Lady Hem) did her duty by Madeleine perfectly and thoroughly; but still, as Mrs. Mac would confess, "she was not one of them; she was of a different family; and what could you expect out of your own blood and bone?" "One

of them" meant of the Kilsyth family, of which Mrs. M'Diarmid, to a certain portion of her acquaintance, described herself as a component part. In the late summer and the early autumn, when the Kilsyths and all their friends had left town, dear old Mrs. M'Diarmid would revel in the light with which, though her suns of fashion had set, her horizon was still illumined. When the grandees of Belgravia and Tyburnia have sped northward in the long preëngaged seat of the limited mail; when they are coasting round the ever-verdant Island, or lounging in all the glory of pseudo-naval get-up on the pier at Ryde, there is yet corn in Egypt, balm in Gilead, and fine weather in the suburbs of London. Many of Mrs. M'Diarmid's acquaintance, formed in the earlier and ante-married portion of her life, were found in London during those months. Some had been away to Ramsgate and Margate with their children in June; others, unable to "get away from business," had compromised the matter with their wives by taking a cottage at Richmond or Staines, and running backwards and forwards

from town for a month, and staying at home on the Saturday. To these worthy people Mrs. M'Diarmid was the connecting link between them and that fashionable world, of whose doings they read so religiously every Saturday in the fashionable journal. For her news, her talk, her appearance, they loved this old lady, and paid her the greatest court. From some of them she received brevet rank, and was spoken of as the Honourable Mrs. M'Diarmid; from all she received kindness and—what she never gave herself — toadyism. Pleasant dinners at the furnished cottages at Richmond and Staines, Star-and-Garter refections, picnics on the river; what was even more delicious, a croquet-party on the lawn, tea, and an early supper, with some singing afterwards—all these delights were provided by her acquaintances for Mrs. M'Diarmid, who had nothing to do but to sit still, and be taken about; to recall a few of the scenes of her past season's gaiety; to drop occasionally the names of a few of her grand acquaintance, and to have it thoroughly understood that she was "one of them."

Use is second nature; and by dint of perpetually repeating that she was "one of them," Mrs. M'Diarmid had almost begun to forget the lodging-house and its associations, and to believe that she was a blood-relation of the old house of Kilsyth. It did the old lady no harm, this innocent self-deception it did not render her insolent, arrogant, or stuck-up; it did not for an instant tend to render her forgetful of her position in the household, and it did perhaps increase the fond maternal affection which she entertained for Madeleine. How could Lady Muriel feel for that girl like one of her own blood? Besides, had she not now children of her own, about whose future she was naturally anxious, and whose future might clash with that of her step-daughter? Whose future? Ay, it was about Madeleine's future that she was so anxious; and just about this stage in our history Mrs. M'Diarmid, revolving all these things in her mind, set herself seriously to consider what Madeleine's future should be.

To a woman of Mrs. M'Diarmid's stamp the future of a young girl, it is almost needless to

say, meant her marriage. Notwithstanding all the shams which, to use Mr. Carlyle's phrases, have been exploded, all the Babeldoms which have been talked out, all the mockeries, delusions, and snares which have been exposed, it yet remains that marriage is the be-all and end-all of the British maiden's existence. That accomplished, life shuts up, or is of no account, with the orange-flowers and the tinkling bells, the ring, the oath, and the blessing; all that childhood has played at, and maidenhood has dreamed of, is at an end. The husband is secured; and so long as he is in the requisite position and possesses the requisite means—*vogue la galère*, in its most respectable translation, be it understood—all that is requisite on friends' part has been done. We laugh when we hear that a charwoman offers to produce her "marriage-lines" in proof of her respectability; but we slur over the fact that in our own social status we are content to aim at the dignity achieved by the charwoman's certificate, and not to look beyond into the future thereby opened.

Madeleine's marriage? Yes; Mrs. M'Diarmid had turned that subject over in her mind a hundred thousand times; had chewed the cud of it until all taste therein had been exhausted; had had all sorts of preposterous visions connected therewith, none of which had the smallest waking foundation. Madeleine's marriage? It was by her own marriage that Mrs. M'Diarmid had made her one grand *coup* in life, and consequently she attached the greatest value to it. She was always picturing to herself Madeleine married to each or one of the different visitors in Brook-street; seeing her walking up the aisle with one, standing at the altar-rails with another, muttering "I will" to a third, and shyly looking up after signing the register with a fourth. The old lady had the good sense to keep these mental pictures in her own mental portfolio, but still she was perpetually drawing them forth for her own mental delectation. None of the young men who were in the habit of dropping in in Brook-street for a cup of afternoon tea and a social chat had any notion of the wondrous scenes passing through the brain of the quiet elderly lady,

whom they all liked and all laughed at. None of them knew that in Mrs. Mac's mind's eye, as they sat there placidly sipping their tea and talking their nonsense, they were transfigured; that their ordinary raiment was changed into the blue coat and yellow waistcoat dear to this valentine artist; that from their coat-collar grew the attenuated spire of a village church, and that sounds of chiming bells drowned their voices. Madeleine as a countess presented at a drawing-room "on her marriage;" Madeleine receiving a brilliant circle as the wife of a brilliant member of the House of Commons; Madeleine doing the honours of the British embassy at the best and most distinguished legation which happened at the time to be vacant. All these pictures had presented themselves to Mrs. M'Diarmid, and been filled up by her mentally in outline and detail. Other supplementary pictures were there in the same gallery. Madeleine presenting new colours to the gallant 140th as the wife of their colonel; Madeleine landing from the Amphitrite, amidst the cheers of her crew, as the wife of their admiral; Madeleine graciously re-

ceiving the million pounds' worth of pearls and diamonds which the native Indian princes offered to the wife of their governor-general. All these different shiftings of the glasses of the magic lantern appeared to Mrs. M'Diarmid as she noticed the attention paid to Madeleine by the different visitors in Brook-street.

But these, after all, were mere daydreams, and it was time Mrs. M'Diarmid thought that some real and satisfactory match should be arranged for her dear child. Since the return of the family from Scotland, after Madeleine's illness, Mrs. M'Diarmid either had noticed, or fancied she had noticed, that Lady Muriel was less interested in her stepdaughter than ever, more inclined to let her have her own way, less particular as to who sought her society. Under these circumstances, not merely did Mrs. M'Diarmid's dragon watchfulness increase tenfold, but the necessity of speedily taking her darling into a different atmosphere, and surrounding her with other cares and hopes in life, made itself doubly apparent. For hours and hours the old lady sat in her own little room, cosy little room,

—neat, tidy, clean, and wholesome-looking as the old lady herself,—revolving different matrimonial schemes in her mind, guessing at incomes, weighing dispositions, thinking over the traits and characteristics, the health and position of every marriageable man of her acquaintance. And all to no purpose; for the old lady, though a tolerably shrewd and worldly-wise old lady, was a good woman: in the early days of the lodging-house she had had a spirit of religion properly instilled into her; and this, aided by her genuine and unselfish love for Madeleine, would have prevented her from wishing to see the girl married to any one, no matter what were his wealth, position, and general eligibility, unless there was the prospect of her darling's life being a happy one with him. "I don't see my way clear, my dear," she would say to Mrs. Tonkley, the most intimate of her early life acquaintances, and the only one whom the old lady admitted into her confidence (Mrs. Tonkley had been Sarah Simmons, daughter of Simmons's private hotel, and had married Tonkley, London representative of Blades and Buckhorn of Shef-

field),—"I don't see my way clear in this business, my dear, and that's the truth. Powers forbid my Madeleine should marry an old man, though among our people it's considered to be about the best thing that could happen to a girl, provided he's old enough, and rich into the bargain. Why, there are old fellows, tottering old wretches, that crawl about with minereal teeth in their mouths and other people's hair on their heads, and they'd only have to say, 'Will you?' to some of the prettiest and the best-born girls in England, and they'd get the answer 'Yes' directly minute! No, no; I've seen too much of that. Not to name names, there's one old fellow, a lord and a general, all stars and garters and crosses and ribbons, and two seasons ago he carried off a lovely girl. I won't put a name to her, my dear, but you've seen her photographic likeness in the portrait-shops; and what is it now? Divorced? Lord, no, my dear; that sort of thing's never done amongst us, nor even separation, so far as the world knows. O no; they live very happily together, to all outward show, and she has her

opera-box, and jewels as much as she can wear; but, Lor' bless you, I hear what the young fellows say who come to our house about the way she goes on, and the men who are always about her, and who was meant by the stars and blanks in last week's *Dustman*. No, no; no old wretch for Madeleine; nor any of your fast boys either, with their drags and their yachts, and their hunters and their Market Harboroughs, and their Queen's Benches, I tell 'em; for that's what it'll come to. You can't build a house of paper, specially of stamped paper, to last very long; and though you touch it up every three months or so, at about the end of a year down it goes with a run, and you and your wife and the lot of you go with it! That would be a pleasant ending for my child, to have to live at Bolong on what her husband got by winning at cards from the foreigners; and that's not likely to be much, I should think. No; that would never do. I declare to you, my dear Sarah, when I think about that dear girl's future, I am that driven as to be at my wits' end."

There was another reason for the old lady's

feeling "driven" when thinking over her dear girl's future which she never imparted to her dear Sarah, nor indeed to anyone else, but which she crooned over constantly, and relished less and less after each spell of consideration, and that was the evident intention of Lady Muriel with regard to Ramsay Caird. Mrs. M'Diarmid, though a woman of strong feelings, rarely, if ever, took antipathies; but certainly her strong aversion to Ramsay Caird could be called by no other name. She hated him cordially, and took very little pains to conceal her dislike, though, if she had been called upon, she would have found it difficult to define the reasons for her prejudice. It was probably the obvious purpose for which he had been introduced into the family, which the old lady immediately divined and as immediately execrated, that made her his enemy; but she could not put forward this reason, and she had no other to offer. She used to say to herself that he was a "down-looking fellow," which was metaphorical, inasmuch as Ramsay Caird had rather a frank and free expression, though, to one more versed in phy-

siognomy than Mrs. M'Diarmid, there certainly was a shifty expression in his eyes. She hated to see him paying attention to Madeleine, bending over her, hovering near her—in her self-communion the old lady declared that it gave her "the creeps"—and it was with great difficulty that she refrained when present from actually shuddering. It was lucky that she did so refrain; for Lady Muriel, who brooked no interference with her plans, would have ruthlessly given Mrs. Mac her *congé*, and closed the doors of Brook-street against her for ever.

To find someone so eligible that Kilsyth would take a fancy to him—a fancy which Lady Muriel could not, in common honesty, combat—and thus to get rid of Ramsay Caird and his pretensions to Madeleine's hand,—this was Mrs. M'Diarmid's great object in life. But she had pottered hopelessly about it; and it is probable that she would never have succeeded in getting the smallest clue to what, if properly carried through, might really have led to the accomplishment of her hopes, had it not been for her own kindness of heart, which

led her to spend many of her leisure half-hours in the nursery with Lady Muriel's little girls. Sitting one day with these little ladies, but in truth not attending much to their prattle, being occupied in her favourite daydream, Mrs. M'Diarmid was startled by hearing an observation which at once interested her, and caused her to attend to the little ladies' conversation.

"When you grow up, Maud, will you be like Maddy?" asked little Ethel.

"I don't know," replied her sister. "I think I shall be quite as pretty as Maddy; and I'm sure I sha'n't be half so dull."

"You don't know that! People are only dull because they can't help it. They're not dull on purpose; only because they can't help it."

"Well, then, I shall help it," said Maud in an imperious way. "Besides, it's not always that Maddy's dull; she's only dull since we've been back in London; she wasn't dull at Kilsyth."

"Ah, no one was dull at Kilsyth," said little Ethel with a sigh.

"O, we all know what you mean by that,

Ethel," said Maud. "You silly sentimental child, you were happy at Kilsyth because you had *someone* with you."

"Well, it's no use talking to you, Maud; because you're a dreadful flirt, and care for no one in particular, and like to have a heap of men always round you. But wasn't Madeleine happy at Kilsyth because she had *someone* with her?"

"Why, you don't mean that Lord Roderick?"

"Lord Roderick, indeed! I should think not," said little Ethel, flushing scarlet. "Madeleine's 'someone' was much older and graver and wiser and sterner, and nothing like so good-looking."

"Ethel dear, you talk like a child!" said Maud, who, by virtue of her twelvemonth's seniority, gave herself quite maternal airs towards her sister. "Of course I see you're alluding to Dr. Wilmot; but you can't imagine that Maddy cared for him in any way but that of a—a friend who was grateful to him—for—"

"O yes! 'Your grateful patient,' we know! Maddy did not know how to end her note to

him the other morning, and I kept suggesting all kinds of things: 'yours lovingly,' and 'yours eternally,' and 'your own devoted;' and made Madge blush awfully; and at last she put that. 'Grateful patient'! grateful rubbish! You hadn't half such opportunities as I had of seeing them together at Kilsyth, Maud."

"I'm not half so romantic and sentimental, Ethel; and I can see a doctor talking to a girl about her illness without fancying he's madly in love with her. And now I am going to my music." And Maud pranced out of the room.

And then Mrs. M'Diarmid, who had greedily swallowed every word of this conversation between the children, laid down the book over which she had been nodding; and going up to little Ethel, gave herself over to the task of learning from the child her impressions of the state of Madeleine's feelings towards Dr. Wilmot, and of gleaning as much as she could of all that passed between them at Kilsyth; the result being that little Ethel, who was, as her sister had said, sentimentally and romantically inclined, led her

old friend to believe, first, that Madeleine was deeply attached to the doctor, and, secondly, that the doctor was inclined to respond promptly to the young lady's sentiments.

That night Mrs. M'Diarmid remained at home, for the purpose of "putting on her considering cap," as she phrased it, and steadily looking at the question of Madeleine's future in the new light now surrounding it. Like all other old ladies, she had a *tendresse* for the medical profession; and though she had never met Dr. Wilmot, she had often heard of him, and had taken great interest in his rise and progress. And this was the man who was to fulfil her expectations, and to prevent Madeleine's being sacrificed to a sordid or disagreeable match? It really seemed like it. Dr. Wilmot was in the prime of life, was highly thought of and esteemed by all who knew him, was essentially a man of mark in the world, and must be in the enjoyment of a very lucrative practice. Practice? ay, that was rather awkward! Kilsyth would not care much about having a son-in-law who was in

practice, and at the beck and call of every hypochondriacal old woman; and Lady Muriel would, Mrs. Mac was certain, refuse to entertain such a notion. And yet Dr. Wilmot was in every other respect so eligible; it was a thousand pities! Dr. Wilmot! Yes, there it was; that "Doctor" would stick to him through life; and he, from all she had heard of him, was just the man to be proud of the title, and refuse to be addressed by any other. Unless, indeed, they could get him knighted; that would be something indeed. Sir —Sir—whatever his name was—Wilmot would sound very well; and nobody need ever know that he had felt pulses and written prescriptions. That is, of course, if he retired from his profession, as he would do on his marriage into "our" family; because if the unpleasantness with Lady Muriel and—but then how were they to live? Dr. Wilmot could not possibly have saved enough money to retire upon; and though Madeleine had her own little fortune, neither Kilsyth nor Lady Muriel would feel inclined to accept for a son-in-law a penniless man, unless he had some old

alliance with the family. The old lady was very much puzzled by all these thoughts. She sat for hour after hour revolving plans and projects in her head, without arriving at any definite result. The want of adequate fortune without continuing in practice—that was what worried Mrs. M'Diarmid. She had already perfectly settled in her own mind that Madeleine and Wilmot adored each other. She had pictured them both at the altar, and settled upon the new dress to which she should treat herself on the occasion of their marriage—a nice brown *moire;* none of your cheap rubbish—a splendid silk, stiff as a board, that would stand upright by itself, as one might say; and she knew just the pew which she would be shown into. All the arrangements were completed in Mrs. Mac's mind—all, with the exception of the income for the happy pair.

How could that be managed? What could be done? Were there not appointments, government things, where people were very well paid, and which were always to be had, if asked for by people of influence? Straightway the inde-

fatigable old lady began questioning everybody able to give her information about consulships, secretaryships, and commissionerships; and received an amount of news that quite bewildered her. Two or three men in the Whitehall offices, who were in the habit of coming to Brook-street, from whom she had endeavoured to glean information, amused themselves by telling her the wildest nonsense of the necessary qualifications for such appointments; so that the old lady was in despair, and almost at her wits' end, when she suddenly bethought her of Mr. Foljambe. The very man! Wealthy and childless, with the highest opinion of Wilmot, and with a great regard for Madeleine. Mrs. Mac remembered hearing it said in Brook-street, long before Madeleine's illness, that Mr. Foljambe would in all probability leave his fortune to Dr. Wilmot. And his fortune was a very large one—quite enough to keep up the dignity of a knight upon; though indeed, as there would be no lack of money, Mrs. Mac did not see why a baronetcy should not be substituted. Lady Wilmot, and

green-and-gold liveries, and hair-powder, of course; that would be the very thing, if that dear old man would only settle it, and not care to live too long after he had settled it—his attacks of gout were dreadful now, she had heard Lady Muriel say—all would be well. Would it be possible to ascertain whether there was any real foundation for the gossip whether Mr. Foljambe had really made Wilmot his heir? Would it not be possible to give him such hints respecting his power of benefiting the future of two persons in whom he had the greatest interest as to settle him finally in his amiable determination? Mrs. M'Diarmid was a woman of impulse, and believed much in the expediency of "clinching the nail," and "striking the iron while it was hot," as she expressed it. "In such matters as these," she was accustomed to say, "nothing is ever done by third parties, or by writing; if you want a thing done, go and see about it at once, and go and see about it yourself, Lord love you!" Acting on which wise maxims, Mrs. M'Diarmid determined to call in person upon

Mr. Foljambe, and then and there "have it out with him."

At ten o'clock on the following morning, Mr. Foljambe, seated at breakfast, was disturbed by a sharp rap at his street-door. Mrs. M'Diarmid was right in saying that the old gentleman's gout had been extra troublesome lately, and his temper had deteriorated in proportion to the sharpness and the frequency of the attacks. He had had some very sharp twinges the previous evening, and was in anything but a good temper; and as the clanging knock resounded through the hall, and penetrated to the snug little room where the old gentleman, in a long shawl dressing-gown, such as were fashionable five-and-twenty years ago, but are now seldom seen out of farces, was dallying with his toast and glancing at the *Times*, he broke out into a very naughty exclamation. A thorough type of the old English gentleman of his class, Mr. Foljambe, as witness his well-bred hands and feet,—the former surrounded by long and beautifully white wristbands, one of the latter

incased in the nattiest of morocco-leather slippers, though the other was in a large list shoe,—his high cross-barred muslin cravat, his carefully trimmed gray whiskers, and his polished head.

"Visitors' bell!" muttered the old gentleman to himself, after giving vent to the naughty exclamation. "What the deuce brings people calling here at this hour? Just ten!" with a glance at the clock. "'Pon my word, it's too bad; as though one were a doctor, or a dentist, and on view from now till five. Who can it be? Collector of some local charity, probably, or someone to ask if somebody else doesn't live here, and to be quite astonished and rather indignant when he finds he's come to the wrong house."

"Well, Sargeant," to the servant who had just entered, "what is it?"

"Lady, sir, to speak with you," said Sargeant, grim and inflexible. He objected to women anywhere in general, but at that house in particular. Like his master, he passed for a misogynist; but unlike his master, he was one.

"A lady! God bless my soul, what an ex-

traordinary thing for a lady to come here to see me, and at this hour, Sargeant!"

The tone of Mr. Foljambe's voice invited response; but from Sargeant no response came. His master had uttered his sentiments, and there was nothing more to say.

"Why don't you answer, man?" said the old gentleman peevishly. "What sort of a lady is she? Young or old, tall or short? What do you think she has come about, Sargeant?"

"About middle 'ithe; but 'ave her veil down. Wouldn't give a message; but wanted to speak to you partickler, sir."

"Confounded fellow! no getting anything out of him!" muttered the old gentleman beneath his breath. Then aloud, "Where is she?"

"I put the lady in the droring-room, sir; but no fire, as the chimlies was swept this morning."

"I know that; I heard 'em, the scoundrels! No fire! the woman will be perished! Here, bring me down a coat, and take this dressing-gown, and just put these things aside, and poke the fire, and brighten up the place, will you?"

As soon as the old gentleman had put on his coat, and cast a hasty glance at himself in the glass, he hobbled to the drawing-room, and there found a lady seated, who, when she raised her veil, partly to his relief, partly to his disappointment, revealed the well-known features of Mrs. M'Diarmid.

"God bless my soul, my dear Mrs. Mac, who ever would have thought of seeing you here! I mean to say this is what one might call an unexpected pleasure. Come out of this confoundedly cold room, my dear madam. Now I know who is my visitor, I will, with your permission, waive all formality and receive you in my sanctum. This way, my dear madam. You must excuse my hobbling slowly; but my old enemy the gout has been trying me rather severely during the last few days."

Chattering on in this fashion, the old gentleman gallantly offered Mrs. M'Diarmid his arm, and led her from the cold and formally-arranged drawing-room, where everything was set and stiff, to his own cheerful little room, the perfection of bachelor comfort and elegance.

"Wheel a chair round for the lady, Sargeant, there, with its back to the light, and push that footstool nearer.—There, my dear madam, that's more comfortable. You have breakfasted? Sorry for it. I've some orange pekoe that is unrivalled in London, and there's a little ham that is perfectly de-licious. You won't? Then all I can say is, that yours is the loss. And now, my dear madam, you have not told me what has procured me the honour of this visit."

Had the old lady been viciously disposed, she might easily have pleaded that her host had not given her the chance; but as it was her policy to be most amiable, she merely smiled sweetly upon him, and said that her visit was actuated by important business.

Outside the bank-parlour, Mr. Foljambe detested business visits of all kinds; and even there he only tolerated them. Female visitors were his special aversion; and the leaden-buttoned porter in Lombard-street had special directions as to their admission. The junior partner, a buck of forty-five, who dressed according to the fashion

of ten years since, and who was supposed still to cause a flutter in the virgin breasts of Balham, where his residence, "The Pineries," was situate, was generally told off to reply to the questions of such ladies as required consultation with Burkinyoung, Foljambe, and Co.

So that when Mrs. M'Diarmid mentioned business as the cause of her visit, the old gentleman was scarcely reassured, and begged for a further explanation.

"Well, when I say business, Mr. Foljambe," said the old lady, again resuming her smile, "I scarcely know whether I'm doing justice to what lies in my own—my own bosom. Business, Mr. Foljambe, is a hard word, as I know well enough, connected with my early life—of which you know, no doubt, from our friends in Brook-street—connected with boot-cleaning, and errand-sending, and generally poor George's carryings-on in—no matter. And indeed there is but little business connected with what rules the court, the camp, the grove, and is like the red red rose, which is newly sprung in June, sir. You will

perceive, Mr. Foljambe, that I am alluding to Love."

"To Love, madam!" exclaimed the old gentleman with a jerk, thinking at the same time, "Good God! can it be possible that I have ever said anything to this old vulgarian that can have induced her to imagine that I'm in love with her?"

"To Love, Mr. Foljambe; though to you and me, at our time of life, such ideas are generally *non compos.* Yet there are hearts that feel for another; and yours is one, I am certain sure."

"You must be a little clearer, madam, if you want me to follow you," said the old gentleman gruffly.

"Well, then, to have no perspicuity or odontification, and to do our duty in that state into which heaven has called us," pursued Mrs. Mac, with a lingering recollection of the Church Catechism, "am I not right in thinking that you take an interest in our Maddy?"

"In Miss Kilsyth?" said Foljambe. "The very greatest interest that a man at—at my time

of life could possibly take in a girl of her age. But surely you don't think, Mrs. M'Diarmid, that—that I'm in love with her?"

"Powers above!" exclaimed Mrs. Mac, "do you think that I've lost my reason; or that if you were, it would be any good? Do you think that I for one would stand by and see my child sacrificed? No, of course I don't mean that! But what I do mean is, that you're fond of our Maddy, ain't you?"

"Yes," said the old gentleman with a burst; "yes, I am; there, will that content you? I think Madeleine Kilsyth a very charming girl!"

"And worthy of a very charming husband, Mr. Foljambe?"

"And worthy of a very charming husband. But where is he? I have been tolerably intimate with the family for years—not, of course, as intimate as you, my dear Mrs. M'Diarmid, but still I may say an intimate and trusted friend—and I have never seen anyone whom I could think in the least likely to be a *prétendu*—not in the least."

"N-no; not before they left for Scotland, certainly."

"No; and then in Scotland, you know, of course there would have been a chance—country house full of company, thrown together and all that kind of thing—best adjuncts for love-making, importunity and opportunity, as I daresay you know well enough, my dear madam; but then Maddy was taken ill, and that spoilt the whole chance."

"Spoilt the whole chance! Maddy's illness spoilt the whole chance, did it? Are you quite sure of that, Mr. Foljambe? Are you quite sure that that illness did not decide Maddy's future?"

"That illness!"

"That illness. 'Importunity and opportunity,' to quote your own words, Mr. Foljambe, the last if not the worst — have it how you will."

"My dear Mrs. M'Diarmid, you are speaking in riddles; you are a perfect Sphinx, and I am, alas, no Œdipus. Will you tell me shortly what you mean?"

"Yes, Mr. Foljambe, I will tell you; I came to tell you, and to ask you, as an old friend of the family, what you thought. More than that, I came to ask you, as an old friend of one whom I think most interested, what you thought. You know well and intimately Dr. Wilmot?"

"Know Wilmot? Thoroughly and most intimately, and—why, good God, my dear madam, you don't think that Wilmot is in love with Miss Kilsyth?"

"I confess that I have thought—"

"Rubbish, my dear madam! Simple nonsense! You have been confounding the attention which a man wrapped up in his own profession, in the study of science, pays to a case with attentions paid to an individual. Why, my dear madam, if—not to be offensive—if *you* had had Miss Kilsyth's illness, and Wilmot had attended you, he would have bestowed on you exactly the same interest."

"Perhaps while the case lasted, Mr. Foljambe, while his professional duty obliged him to do so; but not afterwards."

"Not afterwards? Does Dr. Wilmot still pay attention to Miss Kilsyth?"

"The last time I was in Brook-street I saw him there," said the old lady, bridling, "paying Miss Kilsyth great 'attention.'"

"Then it was a farewell visit, Mrs. M'Diarmid," replied Mr. Foljambe. "Dr. Wilmot quits town—and England—at once, for a lengthened sojourn on the Continent."

"Leaves town—and England?" said Mrs. Mac blankly.

"For several months. Devoted to his profession, as he always has been, without the smallest variation in his devotion, he goes to Berlin to study in the hospitals there. Does that look like the act of an ardent *soupirant*, Mrs. M'Diarmid?"

"Not unless he has reasons for feeling that it is better that he should so absent himself," said the old lady.

"Of that you will probably be the best judge," said Mr. Foljambe. "My knowledge of Chudleigh Wilmot is not such as to lead me to be-

lieve that he would 'set his fortunes on a die' without calculating the result."

In the "off season," when her fashionable friends were away from town, Mrs. M'Diarmid was in the habit of receiving some few acquaintances who constituted a whist-club, and met from week to week at each other's houses. Amongst this worthy sisterhood Mrs. Mac passed for a very shrewd and clever woman; a "deep" woman, who never "showed her hand." But on turning into Portland-place after her interview with Mr. Foljambe, the old lady felt that she had forfeited that title to admiration, and that too without the slightest adequate result.

CHAPTER IX.

MADELEINE AWAKES.

It is probable that if Chudleigh Wilmot had remained in London, fulfilling his professional duties and leading his ordinary life, the declaration of love and the offer of his hand which in due course he would have made to Miss Kilsyth would have, for the first time, caused that young lady to avow the real state of her feelings towards him to herself. These feelings, beginning in gratitude, had passed into hero-worship, which is perhaps about as dangerous a phase both for adorer and adored as any in the whole category; showing as it does that the former must be considerably "far gone" before she could consent to exalt any man into an object of idolatry, and proving very perilous to the latter from the impossibility of his separating himself from the peculiar attributes which are sup-

posed to call forth the devotion. And Wilmot was just such an idol as a girl like Madeleine would place upon a pedestal and worship with constancy and fervour. The very fact that he possessed none of those qualifications so esteemed by and in the men by whom she was ordinarily surrounded was in her eyes a point in his favour. He did not hunt; he was an indifferent shot; he professed himself worse than a child at billiards, and his whist-playing was something atrocious. But then, for the best man across country, the straightest rider to hounds whom they knew, was Captain Severn, a slangy wretch only tolerated in society for his wife's sake. George Pitcairn was a splendid shot; but he had never heard of Tennyson, and would probably think that Browning was the name of a setter. Major Delapoche was the billiard champion at Kilsyth, where he was never seen out of the billiard-room, except at meal-times; and as for whist there could not be much in that when her father declared that there were not three men at Brookes's who could play so good a rubber as old Dr. M'Johns, the Presbyterian clergyman in the

village. Ever since she had been emancipated from her governess, she had longed to meet some man of name and renown, who would take an interest in her, and whom she could reverence, admire, and look up to. She never pined for the heroes of the novels which she read, probably because she saw plenty of them in her ordinary life, and she was used to them and their ways. The big heavy dragoons of the *Guy-Livingstone* type—by his portrayal of whom Mr. Lawrence establishes for himself such a reputation amongst the young ladies of the middle classes, who pine after the *beaux sabreurs* and the "cool captains," principally because they have never met anyone in real life like them—are by no means such sources of raving among the girls accustomed to country-house and London-season society, who are familiar with something like the prototype of each character. Ronald's brother officers, Kilsyth's sporting friends, and Lady Muriel's connections, had made this kind of type too common for Madeleine, even if her temperament had not been very different, to elevate it into a hero; but she had never met

anyone fulfilling her ideas until Chudleigh Wilmot crossed her path. From the earliest period of her convalescence, from the time when slowly-returning strength gave her an interest again in life, until the time that Wilmot left London, she had indulged in this happy dream. She was something in that man's life, something to which his thoughts occasionally turned, as she hoped, as she believed, with pleasure. As to "being in love" as it is phrased, Madeleine believed that such a state as little applied to Wilmot as to herself, and of her own entire innocence in the existence of such a feeling she was confident. But there was established a curious relation between them which she could not explain, but which she thoroughly understood, and which made her very happy. Hour after hour she would sit thinking over this acquaintance, so singularly begun, so different from anything which she had ever previously experienced, and wondering within herself what a bright clever man like Dr. Wilmot could see to like in a silly girl like herself. If Wilmot had been differently constituted she could have under-

stood it well enough; for though very free from vanity, Madeleine was of course conscious that she had a pretty face, and she could perfectly understand the admiration which she received from Ramsay Caird and the men of whom he was a type. But she imagined Wilmot to be far too staid and serious, far too much absorbed in his studies and his "cases," to notice anything so unimportant.

What could he see in her? She asked herself this question a thousand times without arriving at any satisfactory result. She thought that Wilmot, whom she had exalted into her hero, would naturally not bestow his thoughts on any but a heroine; and she knew that there was very little of the heroine in her. Indeed I, writing this veracious history, am often surprised at my own daring in having, in these highly-spiced times, ventured to submit so very tame a specimen of womanhood to public notice. Madeleine Kilsyth was neither tawny and leopard-like, nor hideous and quaintly-fascinating. She was merely an ordinary English girl, with about as much cleverness as girls have at her age,

when they have had no occasion to use their brains; and she thought and argued in a girlish manner. She could not tell that the difference in each from their ordinary acquaintance pleased them equally. If Madeleine had been bright, clever, witty, fast, flirting, or *blasée*, she would never have seen her physician after her recovery. Wilmot was too thoroughly acquainted with women of all these varieties to find any pleasure in an additional specimen. It was the young girl's freshness and innocence, her frankness and trusting confidence, her bright looks and happy thoughts, that touched the heart of the worn and solitary man, and made him feel that there were in life joys which he had never experienced, and which were yet worth living for.

To admire and reverence him; to find the best and most valuable of resources in his friendship, the wisest and truest guidance in his intellect, the most exquisite of pleasures in his society; to triumph in his fame, and to try to merit his approval—such, as we have seen, had been Madeleine's scheme. Now this was all changed: he

was gone; the greatest enjoyment of her life, his society, was taken from her. He was gone; he would be absent for a long time; she should not see him, would not hear his voice, for weeks—it might be for months: it took her a long time to realise this fact, and with its realisation flashed across her the knowledge that she loved Chudleigh Wilmot.

Loved him! The indefinite inexplicable sentiments so long brooded over were gone now, and she looked into her own heart and acknowledged its condition. So long as he remained in London, so long as there was a chance of seeing him, even though she knew that his departure had been decided on, and was almost inevitable, she yet remained unconscious of the state of her feelings. It was only when he was actually gone, when she knew that the long-dreaded step had been taken, that all chance of seeing him again for months was at an end, that the truth flashed upon her. She loved him!—loved him with the whole warmth, truth, and earnestness of her sweet simple nature; loved him as such a man should be loved—deeply,

fervently, and confidingly. In the first recognition of the existence of this feeling, she was scarcely likely to inquire psychologically into it; but she felt that her love for Wilmot had many component parts. The admiration and reverence with which he had originally inspired her still remained; but with them was now blended a passion which had never before been evoked in her. She longed to see him again, longed to throw her arms round his neck and whisper to him how she loved him. How miserably blind she had been! What childish folly had been hers not sooner to have comprehended the meaning of her feelings towards this man! She loved him, and—a fearful thought flashed across her. Had it come too late, the discovery of this passion? Had she been dreaming when the golden chance of her life came by, and had she let it pass unheeded? And again, what were Wilmot's feelings with regard to her? Was he under such a delusion as had long oppressed her? He was a man, strong-minded, clear-brained, and of subtle intellect; he would know at once whether his liking for her arose

from professional interest, from the friendly feeling which, situated as they had been together at Kilsyth, would naturally spring up between them, or whether it had a deeper foundation and was of a warmer character. His manner to her—save perhaps on that one morning in Brook-street, when Ronald interrupted them so brusquely—had never been marked by anything approaching to warmth; and yet—That morning in Brook-street! there had been a difference then; she had noticed it at the time, and, now regarded in the new light which had dawned upon her, the thought was strengthened and confirmed. She remembered the way in which he held her hand, and looked down at her with a soft earnest gaze out of those wonderful eyes; such a look as she had never had before or since. If ever love was conveyed by looks, if ever eyes spoke, it was surely then. Ah, did he feel for her as she now knew she felt for him, or was it merely warm friendship, fraternal affection, that actuated him? He had gone away; would he have done that if he had loved her? She had asked herself this question before the state of her

own real feelings had dawned upon her, only then substituting the word "like" for love, and had decided that, if he had cared for her ever so little, he would have remained. But her recent discovery led her now to think very differently, and she hoped that this ardour in the cause of science, which prompted this professional visit to Berlin, and necessitated this lengthened absence, might be assumed, and that the real motive of Wilmot's departure might be his desire to avoid her, ignorant as he was of the state of her feelings towards him. Heaven grant that it might be so! for now that she knew herself, it would be easy to recall him. Some pretext could be found for bringing him back to England, back to her; and once together again they would never separate. As this thought passed through her mind her glance fell upon her hands, which were clasped before her, and upon a ring which had been given her by Ramsay Caird. By Ramsay Caird! The curtain dropped as swiftly as it had risen, and Madeleine shivered from head to foot.

It was a pretty ring, a broad hoop of gold

set with three turquoises, and the word "AEI" engraved upon it. Madeleine remembered that Ramsay Caird had presented it to her on her last birthday, and while presenting it had said a few words of compliment and kindness with an earnestness and an *empressement* such as he had never before shown. He was not a brilliant man, but he had the society air and the society talk; and he imported just enough seriousness into the latter when he said something about wishing he had dared to have had the ring perfectly plain—just enough to convey his intended hint without making a fool of himself. Ramsay Caird! There, then, was her fate, her future! Knowing all that had been prearranged, she had been mad enough to dream for a few minutes of loving and being loved by Chudleigh Wilmot, when she knew, as well as if it had been expressly stated instead of merely implied, that Ramsay Caird was looked upon by her family and by most of their intimate friends, as her future husband.

Ramsay Caird her future husband! She her-

self had occasionally thought of him in that position, not with dissatisfaction. Knowing nothing better, she imagined that the liking which she undoubtedly entertained for the pleasant young man was love. She had not been brought up in a very gushing school. She had no intimate friend, no one with whom to exchange confidences; and her acquaintances seemed to make liking do very well for love, at least as far as their *fiances* or their husbands were concerned. Madeleine, when she had thought about the matter, had quite convinced herself that she liked Ramsay very much indeed; and it was only after she discovered that she loved Wilmot that she was undeceived. She thought that she had liked him well enough to marry him, but now she hated herself for ever having entertained such an idea. She knew now that she had never felt love for Ramsay Caird; and she would not marry where she did not love.

A hundred diverse and distracting thoughts and influences were at work within the young girl's mind. Doubt as to whether she was really

loved by Wilmot, doubt as to how far she was pledged to Ramsay Caird, comprehension of the urgent necessity at once to take some steps towards a solution of the difficulty, inability to decide on the fittest course to pursue, disinclination to appeal to her father through bashfulness and timidity, to Lady Muriel through distrust, to Ronald through absolute fear: all these feelings alternated in Madeleine's breast; and as she experienced each and all, there hung over her a sense of an impending dreadful something which she could not explain, could not understand, but which seemed to crush her to the earth.

The cause of the feeling which for some time past had induced her to shrink from Ronald, to be silent and depressed when he was present, and to be rather glad when he stayed away from Brook-street, was now perfectly understood by her. In her new appreciation of herself she saw plainly that the fact of her brother's having always been Ramsay Caird's friend and Chudleigh Wilmot's enemy would, insensibly to herself, have caused an estrangement between them in these

later days. And why was Ronald so hostile to Wilmot, so bitter in his depreciation of him, so grudging in his praise even of Wilmot's professional qualifications? Was this hostility merely a result of Ronald's normal "oddness" and sternness, or did it spring from the fact that Ronald had observed his sister narrowly, and had discovered, before she herself knew of it, the state of her feelings towards Wilmot? Thinking over this, the remembrance of her brother's manner that morning in Brook-street, when he broke in upon her interview with Wilmot, flashed across Madeleine's mind, and she felt convinced that her dread suspicions were right, and that Ronald had guessed the truth.

The reason of his hatred to Wilmot was then at once apparent to Madeleine. Ronald had always supported Ramsay's unacknowledged position in the family very strongly, not demonstratively, but tacitly, as was his custom in most things. He was essentially "thorough;" and Madeleine imagined that nothing would probably annoy him so much as the lack of thoroughness in those whom

he loved and trusted. She saw that, actuated by these feelings, her brother would regard, had regarded what she had previously imagined to be her admiration and reverence, but what she now knew, and what Ronald had probably from the first recognised, to be her love for Chudleigh Wilmot as base treachery; and he hated Wilmot for having, however innocently, called these feelings into play. However innocently? There was a drop of comfort even in this bitter cup for poor Madeleine. However innocently? Ronald was a man of the world, eminently clear-headed and far-seeing—might not his hatred of Wilmot arise from his having perceived that Wilmot himself was aware of Madeleine's feelings, and reciprocated them? He had never said so—never hinted at it; but then that soft fond look into her eyes when they were alone together in the drawing-room in Brook-street rose in the girl's memory, and almost bade her hope.

These mental anxieties, these vacillations between hope and fear, doubt and despair, which

furnished Madeleine with constant food for reflection, were not without their due effect on her bodily health. Her fond father, watching her ever with jealous care, noticed the hectic flush upon her cheek more frequent, her spirits lower, her strength daily decreasing: he became alarmed, and confessed his alarm to Lady Muriel.

"Madeleine is far from well," he said; "very far from well. I notice an astonishing difference in her within the last few months. After her first recovery from the fever, I thought she would take a new lease of life. But Wilmot was right throughout; she is very delicate; the last few weeks have made a perceptible difference in her; and Wilmot is not here to come in and cheer us after seeing her."

"I think you are over-anxious about Madeleine," said Lady Muriel. "I must confess, Alick, she is not strong; she never was before her illness; and I do not believe that she ever recovered even her previous strength; but I do not think so badly of her as you do. As you say, we have not Dr. Wilmot to send for. For reasons best known

to himself, but which I confess I have been unable, so far as I have troubled myself, to fathom, Dr. Wilmot has chosen to absent himself, and to put himself thoroughly out of any chance of his being sent for. But so far as advice goes, I suppose Sir Saville Rowe is still unequalled; and Dr. Wilmot must have full confidence in him, or he would never have begged him to break through his retirement and attend upon Madeleine."

"Yes; that is all very well. Of course Sir Saville Rowe's opinion is excellent and all that, but he comes here but seldom; and one can't talk to him as one could to Wilmot; and he does not stop and talk and all that sort of thing, don't you know? Maddy's is a case where particular interest should be taken, it strikes me; and I think Wilmot did take special interest in her."

"I don't think there can be any doubt of that," said Lady Muriel, with the slightest touch of dryness in her accent. "Dr. Wilmot's devotion to his patient was undeniable; but Dr. Wilmot's away, and not available, and we must do our best to help ourselves during his absence. My

own feeling is that the girl wants thoroughly rousing; she gets moped sitting here day after day with you and me and Mrs. M'Diarmid; and Ronald, when he comes, does not tend much to enliven her. Ramsay Caird is the only one with any life and spirits in the whole party."

"He's a good fellow, Ramsay," said Kilsyth; "a genial, pleasant, brisk fellow."

"He is; and he's a true-hearted fellow, Alick, which is better still. By the way, Alick, he spoke to me again the other day upon that subject which I mentioned to you before—about Madeleine, you recollect?"

"I recollect perfectly, Muriel," said Kilsyth slowly.

"You said then, if you remember, that there was no reason for pressing the matter then—no reason for hurrying it on; that Madeleine was full young, and that it would be better to wait and let us see more of Ramsay. You were perfectly right in what you said. I agreed with you thoroughly, and what you suggested has been done. We have waited now for several months;

Madeleine has gone through a crisis in her life." (Lady Muriel looked steadily at her husband as she said these words to see if he detected any double meaning in them; but Kilsyth only nodded his head gravely.) "We have seen more, a great deal more, of Ramsay Caird; and from what you just said, I conclude you like him?"

"I was not thinking of him in that light when I spoke, my dear Muriel," said Kilsyth; "but indeed I see no reason to alter my opinion. He's a pleasant, bright, good-tempered fellow, and I think would make a good husband. He has seen plenty of life, and will be all the better for it when he settles down."

"Exactly. Well, then, having settled that point, I think you will agree with me that now the matter does press, and there is reason for hurrying it on. Not the marriage,—there is no necessity for hastening with that; but it is both necessary and proper that it should be understood that Madeleine and Ramsay Caird are regularly engaged. As I said before, Madeleine wants rousing. She is *fade* and weary and a little lacka-

daisical. You remember how she burst out crying about that book the other night. She wants employment for her thoughts and her mind; and if she is engaged, and we then find her occupation in searching for a house, then in furnishing it, choosing *trousseau*, brougham, jewels, the thousand-and-one little things that we can find for her to do, you may depend upon it you will soon see her a different being."

Kilsyth said he hoped so; but his tone had little buoyancy in it, and was almost despondent as he added:

"What about Maddy herself? Has she any notion of—of what you have just said to me, Muriel?"

"Any notion, my dear Alick? Madeleine, though backward in some things, has plenty of common sense; and she must be perfectly aware what Ramsay's intentions mean and point to. Indeed my own observation leads me to believe that she not merely understands them, but is favourably disposed towards their object."

"Yes; but what I mean to say is, Maddy

has never been plainly spoken to on the subject."

"No, no; not that I know of."

"But she should be, eh?"

"Of course she should be—and at once. It is not fair to Mr. Caird to keep him longer in suspense; and there are other reasons which render such a course highly desirable."

Again Lady Muriel looked steadfastly at her husband, and again he evaded her glance, and contented himself with nodding acquiescence at her suggestion.

"This should be done," continued Lady Muriel, "by someone who has influence with dear Madeleine, whom she regards with great affection, and whose opinion she is likely to respect. I have never said as much to you, my dear Alick, because I did not want to worry you, in the first place; and in the second, because the thing sits very lightly on me, and the feeling is one which is natural, and which I can perfectly understand; but the fact is that I am Madeleine's step-mother only, and she regards me exactly in that light."

"Muriel!" cried Kilsyth.

"My dear Alick, it is perfectly natural and intelligible, and I make no complaint. I should not have alluded to the subject if it were not necessary, you may depend upon it. But I thought perhaps that you might expect me to broach the matter which we have been recently discussing to Madeleine; and for the reasons I have given, I think that would be wholly unadvisable. You did think so, did you not?"

"Well," said Kilsyth, who felt himself becoming rapidly 'cornered,' "I confess I was going to ask you to do it; but of course if you—and I feel—of course—that you're right. But then the question comes—as it must be done—who is to do it? I'm sure I could not."

Lady Muriel's brow darkened for a few moments as she heard this, but it cleared again ere she spoke. "There is only one person left then," said she; "and I am not sure that, after all, he is not the most fitting in such a case as this. I mean, of course, Ronald. He is perfectly straightforward and independent; he will see the

matter in its right light; and, above all, he has great influence with Madeleine."

"Ronald's a little rough, isn't he?" said Kilsyth doubtfully; "he don't mean it, I know; but still in a matter like this he might—what do you think?"

"*I* think, as I have said, that he is the exact person. His manner may be a little cold, somewhat *brusque* to most people; but he has Madeleine's interest entirely at heart, and he has always shown her, as you know, the most unswerving affection. He has a liking for Ramsay Caird; he appreciates the young man's worth; and he will be able to place affairs in their proper position."

So Kilsyth, with an inexpressible feeling that all was not quite right, but with the impossibility of being able to better it, vividly before him, agreed to his wife's proposition; and the next day Ronald had a long interview with Lady Muriel, when they discussed the whole subject, and settled upon their plan of action. Ronald undertook the mission cheerfully; he and his step-mother fully

understood each other, and appreciated the necessity of immediate steps. Neither entered into any detail, so far as Chudleigh Wilmot was concerned; but each knew that the other was aware of the existence of that stumbling-block, and was impressed with the expediency of its removal.

Two days afterwards Ronald knocked at the door of Lady Muriel's boudoir at a very much earlier hour than he was usually to be found in Brook-street. When he entered the room he looked a thought more flushed and a thought less calm and serene than was his wont. Lady Muriel also was a little agitated as she rose hastily from her chair and advanced to greet him.

"Have you seen her?" she asked; "is it over? what did she say?"

"She is the best girl in the world!" said Ronald; "she took it quite calmly, and acquiesced perfectly in the arrangement. I think we must have been wrong with regard to that other person —at least so far as Madeleine's caring for him is concerned."

O, of course: Madeleine cared nothing for "that other person," the loss of whose love she was at that moment bewailing, stretched across her bed, and weeping bitterly.

CHAPTER X.

AT OUR MINISTER'S.

MEANWHILE Chudleigh Wilmot, bearing the secret of his great sorrow about with him, bearing with him also the dread horror and gnawing remorse which the fear that his wife had committed self-destruction had engendered in his breast, had sought safety in flight from the scene of his temptation, and oblivion in absence from his daily haunts, and to a certain extent had found both. How many of us are there who have experienced the benefit of that blessed change of climate, language, habit of life? I declare I believe that the continental boats rarely leave the Dover or the Folkestone pier without carrying away amongst their motley load some one or two passengers who are going, not for pleasure or profit, not with the idea of visiting foreign cities

or observing foreign manners, not with the intention of gaining bodily health, or for the vain-glory of being able to say on their return that they have been abroad (which actuates not a few of them), but simply in the hope that the entire change will bring to them surcease of brain-worry and heart-despondency, calm instead of anxiety, peace in place of feverish longing, rest—no matter how dull, how stupid, how torpid—instead of brilliant, baleful, soul-harrowing excitement. After having pursued the beauty of Brompton through the London season; after having spent a little fortune in anonymous bouquets for her and choice camellias for his own adornment; after having duly attended at every fête offered by the Zoological and Botanical Societies, danced himself weary at balls, maimed his feet at croquet-parties, and ricked his neck with staring up at her box from the opera-stalls,—Jones, finding all his *petits soins* unavailing, and learning that the rich stock-broker from Surbiton has distanced him in the race, and is about to carry off the prize, flings himself and his portmanteau on

board the Ostend boat, and finds relief and a renewal of his former devotion to himself among the quaint old Belgian cities. By the time he arrives at the Rhine-bord he is calmer; he has lapsed into the sentimental stage, and is enabled to appreciate and, if anybody gives him the chance, to quote all the lachrymose and all the morbid passages. He relapses dreadfully when he gets to Homburg, because he then thinks it necessary to —as he phrases it in his diary—"seek the Lethe of the gaming-table;" but having lost his five pounds' worth of florins, he is generally content; and when he arrives in Switzerland finds himself in a proper-tempered state of mind, quite fitted to commune with Nature, and to convey to the Jungfrau his very low opinion of the state of humanity in general, and of the female being who has blighted his young affections in particular. And by the time that his holiday is over, and he returns to his office or his chambers, he has forgotten all the nonsense that enthralled him, and is prepared to commence a new course of idiotcy, *da capo*, with another enchantress.

And to Chudleigh Wilmot, though a sensible and thoughtful man, the change was no less serviceable. The set character of his daily duties, the absorbing nature of his studies, the devotion to his profession, which had narrowed his ideas and cramped his aspirations, once cast off and put aside, his mind became almost childishly impressionable by the new ideas which dawned upon it, the new scenes which opened upon his view. In his wonder at and admiration of the various beauties of nature and art which came before him there was something akin to the feeling which his acquaintance with Madeleine Kilsyth had first awakened within him. As then, he began to feel now that for the first time he lived; that his life hitherto had been a great prosaic mistake; that he had worshipped false gods, and only just arrived at the truth. To be sure, he had now the additional feeling of a lost love and an unappeasable remorse; but the sting even of these was tempered and modified by his enjoyment of the loveliness of nature by which he was surrounded.

His time was his own; and to kill it pleasantly

was his greatest object. He crossed from Dover to Ostend, and lingered some days on the Belgian seaboard. Thence he pursued his way by the easiest stages through the flat low-lying country, so rich in cathedrals and pictures, in Gothic architecture and sweet-toned *carillons*, in portly burghers and shovel-hatted priests and plump female peasants. To Bruges, to Ghent, and Antwerp; to Brussels, and thence, through the lovely country that lies round Verviers and Liège, to Cologne and the Rhine, Chudleigh Wilmot journeyed, stopping sometimes for days wherever he felt inclined, and almost insensibly acquiring bodily and mental strength.

There is a favourite story of the practical hard-headed school of philosophers, showing how that one of their number, when overwhelmed with grief at the loss of his only son, managed to master his extreme agony, and to derive very great consolation from the study of mathematics — a branch of science with which he had not previously been familiar. It probably required a peculiar temperament to accept of and benefit

by so peculiar a remedy; but undoubtedly great grief, arising from whatsoever source, is susceptible of being alleviated by mental employment. And thus, though Chudleigh Wilmot bore about with him the great sorrow of his life; though the sweet sad face of Madeleine Kilsyth was constantly before him; and though the dread suspicion regarding the manner of his wife's death haunted him perpetually, as time passed over his head, and as his mind, naturally clever, opened and expanded under the new training it was unconsciously receiving, he found the bitterness of the memory of his short love-dream fading into a settled fond regret, and the horror which he had undergone at the discovery of the seal-ring becoming less and less poignant.

Not that the nature of his love for Madeleine had changed in the least. He saw her sweet face in the blue eyes and fair hair of big blonde Madonnas in altar-pieces in Flemish cathedrals; he imagined her as the never-failing heroine of such works of poetry and fiction as now, for the first time for many years, he found leisure and

inclination to read. He would sit for hours, his eyes fixed on some lovely landscape before him, but his thoughts busy with the events of the past few months—those few months into which all the important circumstances of his life were gathered. One by one he would pass in review the details of his meetings, interviews, and conversations with Madeleine, from the period of his visit to Kilsyth to his last sad parting from her in Brook-street. And then he would go critically into an examination of his own conduct; he was calm enough to do that now; and he had the satisfaction of thinking that he had pursued the only course open to him as a gentleman and a man of honour. He had fled from the sweetest, the purest, the most unconscious temptation; and by his flight he hoped he was expiating the wrong which he had ignorantly committed by his neglect of his late wife. That must be the key-note of his future conduct—expiation. So far as the love of women or the praise of men was concerned, his future must be a blank. He had made his mind up to that, and would go through with it. Of the

former he had very little, but very sweet experience—just one short glimpse of what might have been, and then back again into the dull dreary life; and of the latter—well, he had prized it and cherished it at one time, had laboured to obtain and deserve it; but it was little enough to him now.

Among the old Rhenish towns, at that time of year almost free of English, save such as from economical motives were there resident, Wilmot lingered lovingly, and spent many happy weeks. To the ordinary tourist, eager for his next meal of castles and crags, the town means simply the hotel where he feeds and rests for the night, while its inhabitants are represented by the landlord and the waiters, whose exactions hold no pleasant place in his memory. But those who stay among them will find the Rhenish burghers kindly, cheery, and hospitable, with a vein of romance and an enthusiastic love for their great river strangely mixed up with their national stolidity and business-like habits. Desiring to avoid even such few of his countrymen as were dotted about the enormous

salons of the hotels, and yet, to a certain extent, fearing solitude, Wilmot eagerly availed himself of all the chances offered him for mixing with native society, and was equally at home in the merchant's parlour, the artist's *atelier*, or the student's *kneipe*. Pleasant old Vaterland! how many of us have kindly memories of thee and of thy pleasures, perhaps more innocent, and certainly cheaper, than those of other countries,—memories of thy beer combats, and thy romantic sons, our *confrères*, and thy young women, with such abundance of hair and such large feet!

At length, when more than three months had glided away, Wilmot determined upon starting at once for Berlin. He had lazed away his time pleasantly enough, far more pleasantly than he had imagined would ever have been practicable, and he had laid the ghosts of his regret and his remorse more effectually than at one time he had hoped. They came to him, these spectres, yet, as spectres should come, in the dead night-season, or at that worst of all times, when the night is dead and the day is not yet born, when, if it be

our curse to lie awake, all disagreeable thoughts and fancies claim us for their own. The bill which we "backed" for the friend whose solvency and whose friendship have both become equally doubtful within the last few weeks; the face of her we love, with its last-seen expression of jealousy, anger, and doubt; the pile of neatly-cut but undeniably blank half-sheets of paper which is some day to be covered with our great work—that great work which we have thought of so long, but which we are as far as ever from commencing: all these charming items present themselves to our dreary gaze at that unholy four-o'clock waking, and chase slumber from our fevered eyelids. Chudleigh Wilmot's ghosts came too, but less, far less frequently than at first; and he was in hopes that in process of time they would gradually forsake him altogether, and leave him to that calm unemotional existence which was henceforth to be his.

Meantime he began to hunger for news of home and home's doings. For the first few weeks of his absence he had regularly abstained even from reading the newspapers, and up to the then

time he had sent no address to his servants, choosing to remain in absolute ignorance of all that was passing in London. This was in contradiction to his original intention, but, on carefully thinking it over, he decided that it would be better that he should know nothing. He apprehended no immediate danger to Madeleine, and he knew that she could not be better than under old Sir Saville Rowe's friendly care. He knew that there was no human probability of anything more decisive leaking out of the circumstances of his wife's death. For any other matter he had no concern. His position in London society, his practice, what people said about him, were now all things of the past, which troubled him not; and hitherto he had looked on his complete isolation from his former world as a great ingredient in his composure and his better being. But as his mind became less anxious and his health more vigorous, he began to hunger for news of what was going on in that world from which he had exiled himself; and he hurried off to Berlin, anxious to secure some *pied-à-terre* which he could make at least a temporary

home; and he had no sooner arrived at the Hôtel de Russe than he wrote at once to Sir Saville, begging for full and particular accounts of Madeleine Kilsyth's illness, and to his own servant, desiring that all letters which had been accumulating in Charles-street should be forwarded to him directly.

Knowing that several days must elapse before his much-longed-for news could arrive, Wilmot amused himself as best he might. To the man who has been accustomed to dwell in capitals, and who has been spending some months in provincial towns, there is a something exhilarating in returning to any place where the business and pleasure of life are at their focus, even though it be in so tranquil a city as Berlin. The resident in capitals has a keen appreciation of many of those inexplicable nothingnesses which never are to be found elsewhere; the best provincial town is to him but a bad imitation, a poor parody on his own loved home; and in the same way, though the chief city of another country may be far beneath that to which he is accustomed, nay, even in grandeur

and architectural magnificence may not be comparable to some of the provincial towns of his native land, he at once falls into its ways, and is infinitely more at home in it, because those ways and customs remind him of what he has left behind. Amidst the bustle and the excitement—mild though it was—of Berlin, Wilmot's desire for perpetual wandering began to ebb. A man who has nearly reached forty years of age in a fixed and settled routine of life makes a bad Bedouin; and when the sting which first started him—be it of disappointment, remorse, or *ennui*, and the last worst of all—loses its venom, he will probably be glad enough to join the first caravan of jovial travellers which he may come across, so long as they are bound for the nearest habitable and inhabitable city. Chudleigh Wilmot knew that a return to England and his former life was, under existing circumstances, impossible; he felt that he could not take up his residence in Paris, where he would be constantly meeting old English friends, to whom he could give no valid reason for his self-imposed exile; but at Berlin it would be dif-

ferent. Very few English people, at least English people of his acquaintance, came to the Prussian capital; and to those whose path he might happen to cross he might, for the present at all events, plead his studies in a peculiar branch of his profession in which the German doctors had long been unrivalled; while as for the future—the future might take care of itself!

Wandering Unter den Linden, pausing in mute admiration before the Brandenburger Thor, or the numerous statues with which the patriotism of the inhabitants and the sublime skill of the sculptor Rauch has decorated the city, loitering in the Kunst Kammer of the palace, spending hour after hour in the museum, reviving old recollections, tinged now with such mournfulness as accrues to anything which has been put by for ever, in visiting the great anatomical collection, dropping into the opera or the theatre, and walking out to Charlottenburg or other of the pleasant villages on the Spree, Chudleigh Wilmot found life easier to him in Berlin than it had been for many previous months. There, for the first time since he left

England, he availed himself of the fame which his talent had created for him, and found himself heartily welcome among the leading scientific men of the city, to all of whom he was well known by repute. To them, inquiring the cause of his visit, he gave the prepared answer, that he had come in person to study their mode of procedure, which had so impressed him in their books; and this did not tend to make his welcome less warm. So that, all things taken into consideration, Wilmot had almost made up his mind to remain in Berlin, at least for several months. He could attend the medical schools—it would afford him amusement; and if in the future he ever resumed the practice of his profession, it could do him no harm; his life, such as it was, were as well passed in Berlin as anywhere else; and meanwhile time would be fleeting on, and the gulf between him and Madeleine Kilsyth would be gradually widening. It must widen! No matter to what width it now attained, he could never hope to span it again.

One day, on his return to his hotel after a long ramble, the waiter who was specially de-

voted to his service received him with a pleasant grin, and told him that a "post packet" of an enormous size awaited him. The parcel which Wilmot found on his table was certainly large enough to have created astonishment in the mind of anyone, more especially a German waiter, accustomed only to the small square thin letters of his nation. There was but one huge packet; no letter from Sir Saville Rowe, nor from Mr. Foljambe, to whom Wilmot had also written specially. Wilmot opened the envelope with an amount of nervousness which was altogether foreign to his nature; his hand trembled unaccountably; and he had to clear his eyes before he could set to work to glance over the addresses of the score of letters which it contained. He ran them over hurriedly; nothing from Sir Saville Rowe, nothing from Mr. Foljambe, no line —but he had expected none from any of the Kilsyths. He threw aside unopened a letter in Whittaker's bold hand, a dozen others whose superscriptions were familiar to him, and paused before one, the mere sight of which gave him

an inexplicable thrill. It was a long, broad, blue-papered envelope, addressed in a formal legal hand to him at his house in Charles-street, and marked "Immediate." There are few men but in their time have had an uneasy sensation caused by the perusal of their own name in that never-varying copying-clerk's caligraphy, with its thin upstrokes and thick downstrokes, its carefully crossed *t*'s and infallibly dotted *i*'s. Few but know the "further proceedings" which, unless a settlement be made on or before Wednesday next, the writers are "desired to inform" us they will be "compelled to take." But Chudleigh Wilmot was among these few. During the whole of his career he had never owed a shilling which he could not have paid on demand, and his experience of law in any way had been *nil*. And yet the sight of this grim document had an extraordinarily terrifying effect upon him. He turned it backwards and forwards, took it up and laid it down several times, before he could persuade himself to break its seal, a great splodge of red wax impressed with the letters "L. & L." deeply cut.

At length he broke it open. An enclosure fell from it to the ground; but not heeding that, Wilmot held up the letter to the fast-fading light, and read as follows:

"Lincoln's-inn.

"Sir,—In accordance with instructions received from the late Mr. Foljambe of Portland-place—"

The late Mr. Foljambe! He must be dreaming! He rubbed his eyes, walked a little nearer to the window, and reperused the letter. No; there the sentence stood.

"In accordance with instructions received from the late Mr. Foljambe of Portland-place, we forward to you the enclosed letter. As it appeared that in consequence of your absence from England you could not be immediately communicated with, and in pursuance of the instructions more recently verbally communicated to us by our late client in the event of such a contingency arising, we have taken upon ourselves to make the necessary arrangements for the funeral, as laid down in a memorandum written by the

deceased; and the interment will take place to-morrow morning at Kensal-green Cemetery. We trust you will approve of our proceedings in this matter, and that you will make it convenient to return to London as soon as possible after the receipt of this letter, as there are pressing matters awaiting your directions.

"Your obedient servants,

"LAMBERT & LEE.

"Dr. Wilmot."

The late Mr. Foljambe! His kind old friend, then, was dead! Again and again he read the letter before he realised to himself the information conveyed in that one sentence: the late Mr. Foljambe—pressing matters awaiting his directions. Wilmot could not make out what it meant. That Mr. Foljambe was dead he understood perfectly; but why the death should be thus officially communicated to him, why the old gentleman's lawyers should express a hope that he would approve of their proceedings, and a desire that he should at once return to London,

was to him perfectly inexplicable, unless—but the idea which arose in his mind was too preposterous, and he dismissed it at once.

In the course of his reflections his eyes fell upon the enclosure which had fallen from the letter to the ground. He picked it up, and at a glance saw that it was a note addressed to him in his friend's well-known clear handwriting—clearer indeed and firmer than it had been of late. He opened it at once; and on opening it the first thing which struck him was, that it was dated more than twelve months previously. It ran thus:

"Portland-place.

"My dear Chudleigh,—A smart young gentleman, with mock-diamond studs in his rather dirty shirt, and a large signet-ring on his very dirty hand, has just been witnessing my signature to the last important document which I shall ever sign—my will—and has borne that document away with him in triumph, and a hansom cab, which his masters will duly charge to my account. I shall send this letter humbly by the penny post,

to be put aside with that great parchment, and to be delivered to you after my death. In all human probability you will be by my bedside when that event occurs, but I may not have either the opportunity or the strength to say to you what I should wish you to know from myself; so I write it here. My dear boy, Chudleigh—boy to me, son of my old friend—when I told your father I would look after your future, I made up my mind to do exactly what I have done by my signature ten minutes ago. I knew I should never marry, and I determined that all my fortune should go to you. By the document (the young man in the jewelry would call it a document)—by the document just executed, you inherit everything I have in the world, and are only asked to pay some legacies to a few old servants. Take it, my dear Chudleigh, and enjoy it. That you will make a good use of it, I am sure. I leave you entirely free and unfettered as to its disposal, and I have only two suggestions to make—mind, they are suggestions, and not requirements. In the first place, I should be glad if you would keep on and live in my

house in Portland-place—it has been a pleasant home to me for many years; and I do not think my ghost would rest easily if, on a revisit to the glimpses of the moon, he should find the old place peopled with strangers. It has never known a lady's care—at least during my tenure—but under Mrs. Wilmot's doubtless good taste, and the aptitude which all women have for making the best of things, I feel assured that the rooms will present a sufficiently brave appearance. The other request is, that you should retire from the active practice of your profession. There! I intended to arrive at this horrible announcement after a long round of set phrases and subtle argument; but I have come upon it at once. I do not want you, my dear Chudleigh, entirely to renounce those studies or the exercise of that talent in which I know you take the greatest delight; on the contrary, my idea in this suggestion is, that your brains and experience should be even more valuable to your fellow-creatures than they are now. I want you to be what the young men of the present day call a 'swell' in

your line. I don't want you to refuse to give the benefit of your experience in consultation; what I wish is to think that you will be free—be your own master—and no longer be at the beck and call of everyone; and if any lady has the finger-ache, or M. le Nouveau Riche has over-eaten himself, and sends for you, that you will be in a position to say you are engaged, and cannot come.

"If some of our friends could see this letter, they would laugh, and say that old Foljambe was selfish and eccentric to the last; he has had the advantage of this man's abilities throughout his own illnesses, and now he leaves him his money on condition that he sha'n't cure anyone else! But you know me too well, my dear Chudleigh, to impute anything of this kind to me. The fact is, I think you're doing too much, working too hard, giving up too much time and labour and life to your profession. You cannot carry on at the pace you've been going; and believe an old fellow who has enjoyed every hour of his existence, life has something better than the *renom* gained from

attending crabbed valetudinarians. What that something is, my dear boy, is for you now to find out. I have done my *possible* towards realising it for you.

"And now, God bless you, my dear Chudleigh! I have no other request to make. To any other man I should have said, 'Don't let the tombstone-men outside the cemetery persuade you into any elaborate inscription in commemoration of my virtues. 'Here lies John Foljambe, aged 72,' is all I require. But I know your good sense too well to suspect you of any such iniquity. Again, God bless you!

"Your affectionate old friend,

"JOHN FOLJAMBE."

Tears stood in Wilmot's eyes as he laid aside the old gentleman's characteristic epistle. He took it up again after a pause and looked at the date. Twelve months ago! What a change in his life during that twelve months! Two allusions in the letter had made him wince deeply—the mention of his wife, the suggestion that undoubtedly he

would be at the death-bed of his benefactor. Twelve months ago! He did not know the Kilsyths then, was unaware of their very existence. If he had never made that acquaintance; if he had never seen Madeleine Kilsyth, might not Mabel have been alive now? might he not—Whittaker was a fool in such matters—might he not have been able once more to carry his old friend successfully through the attack to which he now had succumbed? Were they all right—his dead wife, Henrietta Prendergast, the still small voice that spoke to him in the dead watches of the night? Had that memorable visit had such a baleful effect on his career? was it from his introduction to Madeleine Kilsyth that he was to date all his troubles?

His introduction to Madeleine Kilsyth! Ah, under what a new aspect she now appeared! Chudleigh Wilmot knew the London world sufficiently to be aware of the very different reception which he would get from it now, how inconvenient matters would be forgotten or hushed over, and how the heir of the rich and eccentric Mr.

Foljambe would begin life anew; the doctrine of metempsychosis having been thoroughly carried out, and the body of the physician from which the new soul had sprung having been conveyed into the outer darkness of forgetfulness. True, some might remember how Mr. Wilmot, when he was in practice — so honourable of him to maintain himself by his talents, you know, and really considerable talents, and all that kind of thing—and before he succeeded to his present large fortune, had attended Miss Kilsyth up at their place in the Highlands, and brought her through a dangerous illness, don't you know, and that made the affair positively romantic, you see!—Bah! To Ronald Kilsyth himself the proposition would be sufficiently acceptable now. The Captain had stood out, intelligibly enough, fearing the misunderstanding of the world; but all that misunderstanding would be set aside when the world saw that an eligible suitor had proposed for one of its marriageable girls, more especially when the eligible couple kept a good house and a liberal table, and entertained as befitted their position in society.

Wilmot had pondered over this new position with a curled lip; but his feelings softened marvellously, and his heart bounded within him, as his thoughts turned towards Madeleine herself. Ah, if he had only rightly interpreted that dropped glance, that heightened colour, that confused yet trusting manner in the interview in the drawing-room! Ah, if he had but read aright the secret of that childish trusting heart! Madeleine, his love, his life, his wife! Madeleine, with all the advantages of her own birth, the wealth which had now accrued to him, and the respect which his position had gained for him!—could anything be better? He had seen how men in society were courted, and flattered and made much of for their wealth alone,—dolts, coarse, ignorant, brainless, manner-less savages; and he—now he could rival them in wealth, and excel them—ah, how far excel them! —in all other desirable qualities!

Madeleine his own, his wife! The dark cloud which had settled down upon him for so long a time rolled away like a mist and vanished from his sight. Once more his pulse bounded freely

within him; once more he looked with keen clear eyes upon life, and owned the sweet aptitude of being. He laughed aloud and scornfully as he remembered how recently he had pictured to himself as pleasant, as endurable, a future which was now naught but the merest vegetation. To live abroad! Yes, but not solitary and self-contained; not pottering on in a miserable German town, droning through existence in the company of a few old *savans!* Life abroad with Madeleine for a few months in the year perhaps—the wretched winter months, when England was detestable, and when he would take her to brighter climes—to the Mediterranean, to Cannes, Naples, Algiers it may be, where the soft climate and his ever-watchful attention and skill would enable her to shake off the spell of the disease which then oppressed her.

He would return at once — to Madeleine! Those dull lawyers in their foggy den in Lincoln's-inn little knew how soon he would obey their mandate, or what was the motive-power which induced his obedience. In his life he

had never felt so happy. He laughed aloud. He clapped the astonished waiter, who had hitherto looked upon the Herr Englander as the most miserable of his melancholy nation, on the shoulder, and bade him send his passport to the Embassy to be *viséd*, and prepare for his departure. No; he would go himself to the Embassy. He was so full of radiant happiness that he must find some outlet for it; and he remembered that he had made the acquaintance of a young gentleman, son of one of his aristocratic London patients, who was an *attaché* to our minister. He would himself go to the Embassy, see the boy, and offer to do any mission for him in England, to convey anything to his mother. The waiter smiled, foreseeing in his guest's happiness a good *trinkgeld* for himself; gentlemen usually sent their passports by the *hausknecht*, but the Herr could go if he wished it—of course he could go!

So Wilmot started off with his passport in his pocket. The sober-going citizens stared as they met, and turned round to stare after the eager rushing Englishman. He never heeded them;

he pushed on; he reached the Embassy, and asked for his young friend Mr. Walsingham, and chafed and fumed and stamped about the room in which he was left while Mr. Walsingham was being sought for. At length Mr. Walsingham arrived. He was glad to see Dr. Wilmot; thanks for his offer! He would intrude upon him so far as to ask him to convey a parcel to Lady Caroline. *Visa?* O, ah! that wasn't in his department; but if Dr. Wilmot would give him the passport, he'd see it put all right. Would Dr. Wilmot excuse him for a few moments while he did so, and would he like to look at last Monday's *Post*, which had just arrived?

Wilmot sat himself down and took up the paper. He turned it vaguely to and fro, glancing rapidly and uninterestedly at its news. At length his eye hit upon a paragraph headed "Marriage in High Life." He passed it, but finding nothing to interest him, turned back to it again, and there he read:

"On the 13th instant, at St. George's, Hanover-square, by the Lord Bishop of Boscastle,

Madeleine, eldest daughter of Kilsyth of Kilsyth, to Ramsay Caird, Esq., of Dunnsloggan, N.B."

When Mr. Walsingham returned with the passport he found his visitor had fainted.

END OF VOL. II.

LONDON:
ROBSON AND SON, GREAT NORTHERN PRINTING WORKS,
PANCRAS ROAD, N.W.