THE WESTCOTES
AND
TOM TIDDLER'S GROUND

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BY

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DEDICATION.

My dear Henry James,

A spinster, having borrowed a man's hat to decorate her front hall, excused herself on the ground that the house "wanted a something." By inscribing your name above this little story I please myself at the risk of helping the reader to discover not only that it wants a something, but precisely what that something is. It wants—to confess and have done with it—all the penetrating subtleties of insight, all the delicacies of interpretation, you would have brought to Dorothea's aid, if for a moment I may suppose her worth your championing. So I invoke your name to stand before my endeavour like a figure outside the brackets in an algebraical sum, to make all the difference by multiplying the meaning contained.

But your consent gives me another opportunity even more warmly desired. And I think that you,

too, will take less pleasure in discovering how excellent your genius appears to one who nevertheless finds it a mystery in operation, than in learning that he has not missed to admire, at least, and with a sense almost of personal loyalty, the sustained and sustaining pride in good workmanship by which you have set a common example to all who practise, however diversely, the art in which we acknowledge you a master.

A. T. QUILLER-COUCH.

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CHAPTER I.

THE WESTCOTES OF BAYFIELD.

A MURAL tablet in Axcester Parish Church describes Endymion Westcote as "a conspicuous example of that noblest work of God, the English Country Gentleman." Certainly he was a typical one.

In almost every district of England you will find a family which, without distinguishing itself in any particular way, has held fast to the comforts of life and the respect of its neighbours for generation after generation. Its men have never shone in court, camp, or senate; they prefer tenacity to enterprise, look askance upon wit (as a dangerous gift), and are even a little suspicious of eminence. On the other hand they make excellent magistrates, maintain a code of manners most salutary for the poor in whose midst they live, and are looked up to;

are as a rule satisfied, like the old Athenian, if they leave to their heirs not less but a little more than they themselves inherited, and deserve, as they claim, to be called the backbone of Great Britain. Many of the women have beauty, still more have an elegance which may pass for it, and almost all are pure in thought, truthful, assiduous in deeds of charity, and marry for love of those manly qualities which they have already esteemed in their brothers.

Such a family were the Westcotes of Bayfield, or Bagvil, in 1810. Their "founder" had settled in Axcester towards the middle of the seventeenth century, and prospered—mainly, it was said, by usury. A little before his death, which befel in 1668, he purchased Bayfield House from a decayed Royalist who had lost his only son in the Civil Wars; and to Bayfield and the ancestral business (exalted now into Banking) his descendants continued faithful. One or both of the two brothers who, with their half-sister, represented the family in 1810, rode in on every week-day to their Bank-office in Axcester High Street,—a Georgian house of brick, adorned with a porch of plaster fluted to the shape of a sea-shell, out of which a Cupid smiled down upon a brass plate and the inscription "WESTCOTE AND WESTCOTE," and on the first floor, with windows as tall as the rooms, so that from the street you could see through one the shapely legs of Mr. Endymion Westcote at

his knee-hole table, and through another the legs of Mr. Narcissus. The third and midmost window was a dummy, having been bricked up to avoid the window-tax imposed by Mr. Pitt—in whose statesmanship, however, the brothers had firmly believed. Their somewhat fantastic names were traditional in the Westcote pedigree and dated from the seventeenth century.

Endymion, the elder (who took the lead of Narcissus in all things), was the fine flower of the Westcote stock, and out of question the most influential man in Axcester and for many a mile round. Justice of the Peace for the county of Somerset and Major of its Yeomanry, he served " our town " (so he called it) as overseer of the Poor, Governor of the Grammar School, Chairman of Feoffees, Churchwarden, everything in short but Mayor—an office which he left to the tradesmen, while taking care to speak of it always with respect, and indeed to see it properly filled. The part of County Magistrate—to which he had been born—he played to perfection, and with a full sense of its dignified amenity. (It was whispered that the Lord Lieutenant himself stood in some awe of him.) His favourite character, however, was that of plain citizen of his native town. " I'm an Axcester man," he would declare in his public speeches, and in his own way he loved and served the little borough. For its good he held its Parliamentary representation

in the hollow of his hand ; and, as Overseer of the Poor, had dared public displeasure by revising the Voters' List and defying a mandamus of the Court of King's Bench rather than allow Axcester to fail in its duty of returning two members to support Mr. Perceval's Ministry. In 1800, when the price of wheat rose to 184s. a quarter, a poor woman dropped dead in the market place of starvation. At once a mob collected, hoisted a quartern loaf on a pole with the label—"We will have Bread or Blood," and started to pillage the shops in High Street. It was Endymion Westcote who rode up single-handed (they were carrying the only constable on their shoulders) and faced and dispersed the rioters. It was he who headed the subscription list, prevailed on the Vestry to purchase a waggon-load of potatoes, and persuaded the people to plant them—for even the seed potatoes had been eaten, and the gardens lay uncropped and undigged. It was he who met the immediate famine by importing large quantities of rice. Finally, it was he, through his influence with the county, who brought back prosperity by getting the French prisoners sent to Axcester.

We shall talk of these French prisoners by and by. To conclude this portrait of Endymion Westcote. He was a handsome, fresh-complexioned man, over six feet in height, and past his forty-fifth year ; a bachelor and a Protestant. In his youth he had

been noted for gallantry, and preserved some traces of it in his address. His grandfather had married a French lady, and although this union had not sensibly diluted the Westcote blood, Endymion would refer to it to palliate a youthful taste for playing the fiddle. He spoke French fluently, with a British accent which, when appointed Commissary, he took pains to improve by conversation with the prisoners, and was fond of discussing heredity with the two most distinguished of them—the Vicomte de Tocqueville and General Rochambeau.

Narcissus, the younger brother, had neither the height nor the good looks nor the masterful carriage of Endymion, and made no pretence to rival him as a man of affairs. He professed to be known as the student of the family, dabbled in archæology, and managed two or three local societies and field clubs, which met ostensibly to listen to his papers, but really to picnic. An accident had decided this bent of his—the discovery, during some repairs, of a fine Roman pavement beneath the floor of Bayfield House. At the age of eighteen, during a Cambridge vacation, Narcissus had written and privately printed a description of this pavement, proving not only that its *tessellæ* represented scenes in the mythological story of Bacchus, but that the name "Bayfield," in some old deeds and documents written "Bagvil" or "Baggevil," was neither more nor less than a corruption of

Bacchi Villa. Axcester and its neighbourhood are rich in Roman remains—the town stands, indeed, on the old Fosse Way—and, tempted by early success, Narcissus rode his hobby further and further afield. Now, at the age of forty-two, he could claim to be an authority on the Roman occupation of Britain, and especially on the conquests of Vespasian.

The circle of the Westcotes' acquaintance gathered in the fine hall of Bayfield—or, as Narcissus preferred to call it, the *atrium*—drank tea, admired the pavement, listened to the alleged exploits of Vespasian, and wondered when the brothers would marry. Time went on, repeating these assemblies ; and the question became, Will they ever marry ? Apparently they had no thought of it, no idea that it was expected of them ; and since they had both passed forty, the question might be taken as answered. But that so personable a man as Endymion Westcote would let the family perish was monstrous to suppose. He kept his good looks and his fresh complexion ; even now some maiden would easily be found to answer his Olympian nod ; and a vein of recklessness sometimes cropped up through his habitual caution, and kept his friends alert for surprises. In the hunting-field for instance,—and he rode to hounds twice a week,—he made a rule of avoiding fences ; but the world quite rightly set this down to a proper care for his person rather than to timidity, since on one famous

occasion, riding up to find the whole field hesitating before a "rasper" (they were hunting a strange country that day), he put his horse at it and sailed over with a nonchalance relieved only by his ringing laugh on the farther side. It was odds he would clear the fence of matrimony some day, with the same casual heartiness; and, in any case, he was masterful enough to insist on Narcissus marrying, should it occur to him to wish it.

Oddly enough, the gossips who still arranged marriages for the brothers had given over speculating upon their hostess, Miss Dorothea. She could not, of course, perpetuate the name; but this by no means accounted for all the difference in their concern. Dorothea Westcote was now thirty-seven, or five years younger than Narcissus, whose mother had died soon after his birth. The widower had created one of the few scandals in the Westcote history by espousing, some four years later, a young woman of quite inferior class, the daughter of a wholesale glover in Axcester. The new wife had good looks, but they did not procure her pardon; and she made the amplest and speediest amends by dying within twelve months, and leaving a daughter who in no way resembled her. The husband survived her just a dozen years.

Dorothea, the daughter, was a plain girl; her brothers, though kind and fond of her after a fashion,

did not teach her to forget it. She loved them, but her love partook of awe: they were so much cleverer, as well as handsomer, than she. Having no mother or friend of her own sex to imitate, she grew into an awkward woman, sensitive to charm in others and responding to it without jealousy, but ignorant of what it meant or how it could be acquired. She picked up some French from her brother Endymion, and masters were hired who taught her to dance, to paint in water colours, and to play with moderate skill upon the harp. But few partners had ever sought her in the ball-room; her only drawings which anyone ever asked to see were half-a-dozen of the Bayfield pavement executed for Narcissus' monograph; and her harp she played in her own room. Now and then Endymion would enquire how she progressed with her music, would listen to her report and observe: "Ah, I used to do a little fiddling myself." But he never put her proficiency to the test.

Somehow, and long before the world came to the same conclusion, she had resolved that marriage was not for her. She adored babies, though they usually screamed at the sight of her, and she thought it would be delightful to have one of her own who would not scream; but apart from this vague sentiment, she accepted her fate without sensible regret. By watching and copying the mistresses

of the few houses she visited she learned to play the hostess at Bayfield, and, as time brought confidence, played it with credit. She knew that people laughed at her, and that yet they liked her; their liking and their laughter puzzled her about equally. For the rest, she was proud of Bayfield and content, though one day much resembled another, to live all her life there, devoted to God and her garden. Visitors always praised her garden.

Axcester lies on the western side and mostly at the foot of a low hill set accurately in the centre of a ring of hills slightly higher—the raised bottom of a saucer would be no bad simile. The old Roman road cuts straight across this rise, descends between the shops of the High Street, passes the church, crosses the Axe by a narrow bridge, and climbing again passes the iron gates of Bayfield House, a mile above the river. So straight is it that Dorothea could keep her brothers in view from the gates until they dismounted before their office door, losing sight of them for a minute or two only among the elms by the bridge. Her boudoir window commanded the same prospect; and every day as the London coach topped the hill, her maid Polly would run with news of it. The two would be watching, often before the guard's horn awoke the street and fetched the ostlers out in a hurry from the "Dogs Inn" stables with their relay of four horses.

Miss Dorothea possessed a telescope, too; and if the coach were dressed with laurels and flags announcing a victory, mistress and maid would run to the gates and wave their handkerchiefs as it passed.

Sometimes, too, Polly would announce a post-chaise, and the telescope decide whether the post-boys wore the blue or the buff. Nor were these their only causes of excitement; for the great Bayfield elm, a rood below the gates and in full view of them, marked the westward boundary of the French prisoners on *parole*. Some of these were quite regular in their walks—for instance, Rear-Admiral de Wailly-Duchemin and General Rochambeau, who came at three o'clock or thereabouts on Wednesdays and Saturdays, summer and winter. At six paces on the far side of the elm—such was their punctilio—they halted, took snuff, linked arms again and turned back. (Dorothea had entertained them both at Bayfield, and met them at dinner in one or two neighbouring houses.) On the same days, and on Mondays as well, old Jean Pierre Pichou, ex-boatswain of the *Didon* frigate, would come along arm-in-arm with Julien Carales, *alias* Frap d'Abord, ex-*maréchal des logis*—Pichou, with his wooden leg, and Frap d'Abord twisting a grey moustache and uttering a steady torrent of imprecation—or so it sounded. These could be counted on; but scores of others stopped and turned at the Bayfield elm,

and Polly had names for them all. Moreover, on one memorable day Dorothea had watched one who did not halt precisely at the elm. A few paces beyond it, and on the side of the road facing the grounds, straggled an old orchard, out of which her brother Endymion had been missing, of late, a quantity of his favourite pippins—by name (but it may have been a local one) Somerset Warriors. The month was October, the time about half-past four, the light dusky. Yet Miss Dorothea, lingering by the gate, saw a young man pass the Bayfield elm and climb the hedge; and saw and heard him nail against an apple-tree overhanging the road a board with white letters on a black ground. When it was fixed, the artist descended to the road and gazed up admiringly at his work. In the act of departing he turned, and suddenly stood still again. His face was toward the Bayfield gate. Dorothea could not tell if he saw her, but he remained thus, motionless, for almost a minute. Then he seemed to recollect himself and marched off briskly down the road. Early next morning she descended and read the inscription, which ran: "*Restaurant pour les Aspirants.*"

She said nothing about it, and soon after breakfast the board was removed.

CHAPTER II.

THE ORANGE ROOM.

SOME weeks later, on a bright and frosty morning in December, Dorothea rode into Axcester with her brothers. She was a good horsewoman and showed to advantage on horseback, when her slight figure took a grace of movement which made amends for her face. To-day the brisk air and a canter across the bridge at the foot of the hill had brought roses to her cheeks, and she looked almost pretty. General Rochambeau happened to pass down the street as the three drew rein before the Town House (so the Westcotes always called the Bank-office), and, pausing to help her dismount, paid her a very handsome compliment.

Dorothea knew, of course, that Frenchmen were lavish of compliments, and had heard General Rochambeau pay them where she felt sure they were not deserved. Nevertheless she found this one pleasant—she had received so few—and laughed happily. It may have come from the freshness of

the morning, but to-day her spirit sat light within her and expectant—she could not say of what, yet it seemed that something good was going to happen.

"I have a guess," said the old General, "that Miss Westcote and I are bound on the same errand. Hers cannot be to inspect dull bonds and ledgers, bills of exchange or rates of interest."

He jerked his head towards the house, and Dorothea shook hers.

"I am going to 'The Dogs,' General."

"Eh?" He scented the jest and chuckled. "As you say, 'to the dogs' hein? Messieurs, I beg you to observe and take warning that your sister and I are going to the dogs together."

He offered his arm to Dorothea. Her brothers had dismounted and handed their horses over to the ostler who waited by the porch daily to lead them to the inn stables.

"I will stable Mercury myself," said she, addressing Endymion. She submitted her smallest plans to him for approval.

"Do so," he answered. "After running through my letters I will step down to the Orange Room and join you. I entrust her to you, General—the more confidently because you cannot take her far."

He laughed and followed Narcissus through the porch. Dorothea saw the old General wince. She slipped an arm through Mercury's bridle-rein and

picked up her skirt ; the other arm she laid in her companion's.

" You have not seen the Orange Room, Miss Dorothea ? "

" Not since the decorations began." She paused and uttered the thought uppermost in her mind. " You must forgive my brother ; I am sorry he spoke as he did just now."

" Then he is more than forgiven."

" He did not consider."

" Dear Mademoiselle, your brother is an excellent fellow, and not a bit more popular than he deserves to be. Of his kindness to us prisoners—I speak not of us privileged ones, but of our poorer brothers—I could name a thousand acts ; and acts say more than words."

Dorothea pursed her lips. " I am not sure. I think a woman would ask for words too."

" Yes, that is so," he caught her up. " But don't you see that we prisoners are—forgive me—just like women ? I mean, we have learned that we are weak. For a man that is no easy lesson, Mademoiselle. I myself learned it hardly. And seeing your brother admired by all, so strong and prosperous and confident, can I ask that he should feel as we who have forfeited these things ? "

Before she could find a reply he had harked back to the Orange Room.

"You have not seen it since the decorations began? Then I have a mind to run and ask your brother to forbid your coming—to command you to wait until Wednesday. We are in a horrible mess, I warn you, and smell of turpentine most potently. But we shall be ready for the ball, and then——! It will be prodigious. You do not know that we have a genius at work on the painting?"

"My brother tells me the designs are extraordinarily clever."

"They are more than clever, you will allow. The artist I discovered myself—a young man named Charles Raoul. He comes from the South, a little below Avignon, and of good family—in some respects." The General paused and took snuff. "He enlisted at eighteen and has seen service; he tells me he was wounded at Austerlitz. Unhappily he was shipped, about two years ago, on board the *Thétis* frigate, with a detachment and stores for Martinique. The *Thétis* had scarcely left L'Orient before she fell in with one of your frigates, whose name escapes me; and here he is in Axcester. He has rich relatives, but for some reason or other they decline to support him; and yet he seems a gentleman. He picks up a few shillings by painting portraits; but you English are shy of sitting—I wonder why? And we—well, I suppose we prefer to wait till our faces grow happier."

Dorothea had it on the tip of her tongue to ask how the General had discovered this genius; but the ring in his voice gave her pause. Twice in the course of their short walk he had shown feeling; and she wondered at it, having hitherto regarded him as a cynical old fellow with a wit which cracked himself and the world like two dry nuts for the jest of their shrivelled kernels. She did not know that a kind word of hers had unlocked his heart; and before she could recall her question they had reached the stable-yard of "The Dogs." And after stabling Mercury it was but a step across to the inn.

The "Dogs Inn" took its name from two stone greyhounds beside its porch—supporters of the arms of that old family from which the Westcotes had purchased Bayfield; and the Orange Room from a tradition that William of Orange had spent a night there on his march from Torbay. There may have been truth in the tradition; the room at any rate preserved in it window-hangings of orange-yellow, and a deep fringe of the same hue festooning the musicians' gallery. While serving Axcester for ball, rout, and general assembly-room, it had been admittedly dismal—its slate-coloured walls scarred and patched with new plaster, and relieved only by a gigantic painting of the Royal Arms on panel in a blackened frame; its ceiling garnished with four pendants in plaster, like bride-cake ornaments inverted.

To-day, as she stepped across the threshold, Dorothea hesitated between stopping her ears and rubbing her eyes. The place was a Babel. Frenchmen in white paper caps and stained linen blouses were laughing, plying their brushes, mixing paints, shifting ladders, and jabbering all the while at the pitch of their voices. For a moment the din bewildered her; the ferment had no more meaning, no more method, than a school-boy's game. But her eyes, passing over the chaos of paint-pots, brushes, and step-ladders, told her the place had been transformed. The ceiling between the four pendants had become a blue heaven with filmy clouds, and Cupids scattering roses before a train of doves and a recumbent goddess, whom a little Italian, perched on a scaffolding and whistling shrilly, was varnishing for dear life. Around the walls—sky-blue also—trellises of vines and pink roses clambered around the old panels. The energy of the workmen had passed into their paintings, or perhaps Dorothea's head swam; at any rate, the cupids and doves seemed to be whirling across the ceiling, the vines and roses mounting towards it, and pushing out shoots and tendrils while they climbed.

But the panels themselves! They were nine in all: three down the long black wall, two narrower ones at the far end, four between the orange-curtained windows looking on the street. (The fourth

wall had no panel, being covered by the musicians' gallery and the pillars supporting it.) In each, framed by the vines and roses, glowed a scene of classical or pseudo-classical splendour; golden sunsets, pale yellow skies, landscapes cleverly imitated from recollections of Claude Lorraine, dotted with temples and small figures in flowing drapery, with here and there a glimpse of naked limbs. Here were Bacchus and Ariadne, with a company of dancing revellers; Apollo and Marsyas; the Rape of Helen; Dido welcoming Aeneas. . . . Dorothea (albeit she had often glanced into the copy of M. Lempriere's *Classical Dictionary* in her brother's library, and, besides, had picked up something of Greek and Roman mythology in helping Narcissus) did not at once discriminate the subjects of these panels, but her eyes rested on them with a pleasant sense of recognition, and were still resting on them when she heard General Rochambeau say:

"Ah, there is my genius! You must let me present him, Mademoiselle. He will amuse you. Hi, there! Raoul!"

A young man, standing amid a group of workmen and criticising one of the panels between the curtains, turned sharply. Almost before Dorothea was aware, he had doffed his paper cap and the General was introducing him.

She recognised him at once. He was the young

prisoner who had nailed the board against her brother's apple-tree.

He bowed and began at once to apologise for the state of the room. He had expected no visitors before Wednesday. The General had played a surprise upon him. And Miss Westcote, alas! was a critic, especially of classical subjects. He had heard of her drawings for her brother's book.

Dorothea blushed.

"Indeed I am no artist. Please do not talk of those drawings. If you only knew how much I am ashamed of them. And besides, they were meant as diagrams to help the reader, not as illustrations. But these are beautiful."

He turned with a pleasant laugh. She had already taken note of his voice, but his laugh was even more musical.

"Daphne pursued by Apollo," he commenced, waving his hand towards the panel in face of her. "Be pleased to observe the lady sinking into the bush; an effect which the ingenious painter has stolen from no less a masterpiece than the 'Buisson Ardent' of Nicholas Froment."

The General fumbled for the ribbon of his gold eye-glass. M. Raoul moved towards the next panel, and Dorothea followed him.

"Perseus entering the Garden of the Hesperides."

The painting, though slapdash, was astonishingly

clever; and in this, as in other panels, no trace of the artist's hurry appeared in the reposeful design. Coiled about the foot of the tree, the dragon Ladon blinked an eye lazily at three maidens pacing hand in hand in the dance, overhung with dark boughs and golden fruit. Behind them Perseus, with naked sword, halted in admiration, half issuing from a thicket over which stretched a distant bright line of sea and white cliff.

"You like it?" he asked. "But it is not quite finished yet, and Mademoiselle, if she is frank, will say that it wants something."

His voice held a challenge.

"I am sure, sir, I could not guess, even if I possessed——"

"A board, for example?"

"A board?"

She was completely puzzled.

He glanced at her sideways, turned to the panel, and with his forefinger traced the outline of a square upon it, against the tree.

"*Restaurant pour les Aspirants*," he announced.

He said it quietly, over his shoulder. The sudden challenge, her sudden discovery that he knew, made Dorothea gasp. She had not the smallest notion how to answer him, or even what kind of answer he expected, and stood dumb, gazing at his back. A workman, passing, apologised for having brushed

her skirt with the step-ladder he carried. She stammered some words of pardon. And just then, to her relief, her brother Endymion's voice rang out from the doorway :

" Ah, there you are ! Well, I declare ! " He looked around him. " A Paradise, a perfect Paradise ! Indeed, General, your nation has its revenge of us in the arts. You build a temple for us, and on Wednesday I hear you are to provide the music. Tum-tum, ta-ta-ta . . . " He hummed a few bars of Gluck's " Paride ed Elenna," and paused, with the gesture of one holding a fiddle, on the verge of a reminiscence. " There was a time—but I no longer compete. And to whom, General, are we indebted for this—ah—treat ? "

General Rochambeau indicated young Raoul, who stepped forward from the wall and answered, with a respectful inclination :

" Well, M. le Commissaire, in the first place to Captain Seymour."

The General bit his moustache ; Endymion frowned. The answer merely puzzled Dorothea, who did not know that Seymour was the name of the British officer to whom the *Thétis* had struck her colours.

" Moreover," the young man went on imperturbably, " we but repay our debt to M. le Commissaire—for the entertainment he affords us."

Dorothea looked up sharply now, even anxiously ; but her brother took the shot, if shot it were, for a compliment. He put the awkward idiom aside with a gracious wave of the hand. His brow cleared.

"But we must do something for these poor fellows," he announced, sweeping all the workmen in a gaze ; "in mere gratitude we must. A stall, now, at the end of the room under the gallery, with one or two salesmen whom you must recommend to me, General. We might dispose of quite a number of their small carvings and *articles de Paris*, with which the market among the townspeople is decidedly over-stocked. The company on Wednesday will be less familiar with them : they will serve as mementoes, and the prices, I daresay, will not be too closely considered."

"Sir, I beg of you—" General Rochambeau expostulated.

"Eh ? "

"They have given their labour—such as it is—in pure gratitude for the kindness shown to them by all in Axcester. That has been the whole meaning of our small enterprise," the old gentleman persisted.

"Still, I don't suppose they'll object if it brings a little beef to their *ragoûts*. Say no more, say no more. What have we here ? Eh ? 'Bacchus and Ariadne ? ' I am rusty in my classics, but Bacchus,

Dorothea! This will please Narcissus. We have in our house, sir,"—here he addressed Raoul,—"a Roman pavement entirely—ah—concerned with that personage. It is, I believe, unique. One of these days I must give you a permit to visit Bayfield and inspect it, with my brother for *cicerone*. It will repay you——"

"It will more than repay me," the young man interposed, with his gaze demurely bent on the wall.

"I should have said, it will repay your inspection. You must jog my memory."

It was clear Raoul had a reply on his tongue. But he glanced at Dorothea, read her expression, and, turning to her brother, bowed again. Her first feeling was of gratitude. A moment later she blamed herself for having asked his forbearance by a look, and him for his confidence in seeking that look. His eyes, during the moment they encountered hers, had said, "We understand one another." He had no right to assume so much, and yet she had not denied it.

Endymion Westcote meanwhile had picked up a small book which lay face downward on one of the step-ladders.

"So here is the source of your inspiration?" said he. "An *Ovid?* How it brings up old school-days at Winchester—old swishings, too, General,

hey ? " He held the book open and studied the Ariadne on the wall.

" The source of my inspiration indeed, M. le Commissaire ! But you will not find Ariadne in that text, which contains only the *Tristia*."

" Ah, but I told you my classics were a bit rusty," replied the Commissary. He made the round of the walls and commended, in his breezy way, each separate panel. " You must take my criticisms for what they are worth, M. Raoul. But my grandmother was a Frenchwoman, and that gives me a kind of—sympathy, shall we say ? Moreover, I know what I like."

Dorothea, accustomed to regard her brother as a demigod, caught herself blushing for him. She was angry with herself. She caught M. Raoul's murmur. " Heaven distributes to us our talents, Monsieur," and was angry with him, understanding and deprecating the raillery beneath his perfectly correct attitude. He kept this attitude to the end. When the time came for parting, he bent over her hand and whispered again :

" But it was kind of Mademoiselle not to report me."

She heard. It set up a secret understanding between them, which she resented. There was nothing to say, again ; yet she had found no way of rebuking him, she was angry with herself all the way home.

CHAPTER III.

A BALL, A SNOWSTORM, AND A SNOWBALL.

Axcester's December Ball was a social event of importance in South Somerset. At once formal and familiar—familiar, since nine-tenths of the company dwelt close enough together to be on visiting terms—it nicely preluded the domestic festivities of Christmas, and the more public ones which began with the New Year and culminated in the great County Balls at Taunton and Bath. Nor were the families around Axcester jaded with dancing, as were those in the neighbourhood of Bath, for example; but discussed dresses and the prospects of the Ball for some weeks beforehand, and, when the day came, ordered out the chariot or barouche in defiance of any ordinary weather.

The weather since Dorothea's visit to the Orange Room had included a frost, a fall of snow with a partial thaw, and a second and much severer frost; and by Wednesday afternoon the hill below Bayfield wore a hard and slippery glaze. Endymion,

however, had seen to the roughing of the horses. Thin powdery snow began to fall as the Bayfield barouche rolled past the gates into the high road; and Narcissus, who considered himself a weather-prophet, foretold a thaw before morning. Unless the weather grew worse, the party would drive back to Bayfield; but the old caretaker in the Town House had orders to light fires there and prepare the bedrooms, and on the chance of being detained Dorothea had brought her maid Polly.

In spite of her previous visit, the Orange Room gave her a shock of delight and wonder. The litter had vanished, the hangings were in place; fresh orange-coloured curtains divided the dancing-floor from the recess beneath the gallery, and this had been furnished as a withdrawing-room, with rugs, settees, groups of green foliage plants, and candles, the light of which shone through shades of yellow paper. The prisoners, too, had adorned with vari-coloured paperwork the candelabra, girandoles and mirrors which drew twinkles from the long waxed floor, and softened whatever might have been garish in the decorations. Certainly the panels took a new beauty, a luminous delicacy, in their artificial rays; and Dorothea, when, after much greeting and hand-shaking, she joined one of the groups inspecting them, felt a sort of proprietary pleasure in the praises she heard.

Had she known it, she too was looking her best to-night—in an old-maidish fashion, be it understood. She wore a gown of ashen grey muslin, edged with swansdown, and tied with sash and shoulder-knots of a flame-hued ribbon which had taken her fancy at Bath in the autumn. Her sandal-shoes, stockings, gloves, cap—she had worn caps for six or seven years now,—even her fan, were of the same ash-coloured grey.

Dorothea knew how to dress. She also knew how to dance. The music made her heart beat faster, and she never entered a ball-room without a sense of happy expectancy. Poor lady! she never left but she carried home heart-sickness, weariness, and a discontent of which she purged her soul, on her knees, before lying down to sleep. She had a contrite spirit; she knew that her lot was a fortunate one; but she envied her maid Polly her good looks at times. With Polly's face, she might have dancing to her heart's content. Usually she dropped some tears on her pillow after a night's gaiety.

At Bath, at Taunton, at Axcester, it had always been the same, and with time she had learnt to set her hopes low and steel her heart early to their inevitable disappointment. So to-night she took her seat against the wall and watched while the first three *contre-danses* went by without bringing her a partner.

For the fourth—the "Soldier's Joy"—she was claimed by an awkward schoolboy home for the holidays; whether out of duty or obeying the law of Nature by which shy youths are attracted to middle-aged partners, she could not tell, nor did she ask herself, but danced the dance and enjoyed it more than her cavalier was ever likely to guess. Such a chance had, before now, been looked back upon as the one bright spot in a long evening's experience. Dorothea loved all schoolboys for the kindness shown to her by these few.

She went back to her seat, hard by a group to which Endymion was discoursing at large. Endymion's was a mellow voice, of rich compass, and he had a knack of compelling the attention of all persons within range. He preferred this to addressing anyone in particular, and his eye sought and found, and gathered by instinct, the last loiterer without the charmed circle.

"Yes," he was saying, "it is tasteful, and something more. It illustrates, as you well say, the better side of our excitable neighbours across the Channel. Setting patriotism apart and regarding the question merely in its—ah—philosophical aspect, it has often occurred to me to wonder how a nation so expert in the arts of life, so—how shall I put it?——"

"Natty," suggested one of his hearers; but he waved the word aside.

"——of such lightness of touch, as I might describe it,—I say, it has often occurred to me to wonder how such a nation could so far mistake its destiny and the designs of Providence (inscrutable though they be) as to embark on a career of foreign conquest which can only—ah—have one end."

"Come to grief," put in Lady Bateson, a dowager in a crimson cap with military feathers. She was supposed to cherish a hopeless passion for Endymion. Also, she was supposed to be acting as Dorothea's chaperon to-night; but having with little exertion found partners for a niece of her own, a sprightly young lady on a visit from Bath, felt that she deserved to relax her mind in a little intellectual talk. Endymion accepted her remark with magnificent tolerance.

"Precisely." He inclined towards her. "You have hit it precisely."

Dorothea stole a glance at her brother. Military and hunt uniforms were *de rigueur* at these Axcester balls, and a Major of Yeomanry more splendid than Endymion Westcote it would have been hard to find in England. He stood with a hand negligently resting on his left hip—the sword hip,—his right foot advanced, the toe of his polished boot tapping the floor. His smile, indulgent as it hovered over Lady Bateson, descended to this protruded leg and became complacent, as it had a right to be.

"Well, I've always said so from the start," Lady Bateson announced, "and now I'm sure of it. I don't mind Frenchmen *as* Frenchmen; but what I say is, let them stick to their fal-de-rals."

"That is the side of them which, in my somewhat responsible position, I endeavour to humour. You see the result." He swept his hand towards the painted panels. "One thing I must say, in justice to my charges, I find them docile."

Dorothea had confidence in her brother's tact and his unerring eye for his audience. Yet she looked about her nervously, to make sure that of the few prisoners selected for invitation to the ball, none was within earshot. The Vicomte de Tocqueville, a stoical young patrician, had chosen a partner for the next dance, and was leading her out with that air of vacuity with which he revenged himself upon the passing hour of misfortune. "Go on," it seemed to say, "but permit me to remind you that, so far as I am concerned, you do not exist." Old General Rochambeau and old Rear-Admiral de Wailly-Duchemin, in worn but carefully-brushed regimentals, patrolled the far end of the room arm-in-arm. The Admiral seemed in an ill humour; and this was nothing new, he grumbled at everything. But the General's demeanour, as he trotted up and down beside his friend (doubtless doing his best to pacify him) betrayed an unwonted agitation.

It occurred to Dorothea that he had not yet greeted her and paid his usual compliment.

"Miss Westcote is not dancing to-night?"

The voice was at her elbow, and she looked up with a start—to meet the gaze of M. Raoul.

"Excuse me"—she wished to explain why she had been startled—"I did not expect——"

"To see me here! It appears that they have given the scene-painter a free ticket, and I assume that it carries permission to dance, provided he does not display in an unseemly manner the patch in the rear of his best tunic."

He turned his head in a serio-comic effort to stare down his back. Dorothea admitted to herself that he made a decidedly handsome fellow in his blue uniform with red facings and corded epaulettes; nor does a uniform look any the worse for having seen a moderate amount of service.

"But Mademoiselle was in a—what do you call it?—a brown study, which I interrupted."

"I was wondering why General Rochambeau had not yet come to speak with me."

"I can account for it, perhaps; but first you must answer my question, Mademoiselle. Are you not dancing to-night?"

"That will depend, sir, on whether I am asked or no."

She said it almost archly, on the moment's impulse, and, the words out, felt that they were over-bold. But she did not regret them when her eyes met his. He was offering his arm, and she found herself joining in his laugh—a happy, confidential little laugh. Dorothea cast a nervous glance towards her brother, but Endymion's back was turned. She saw that her partner noted the look, and half-defiantly she nodded towards the gallery as the French musicians struck into a jolly jigging quick-step with a crash at every third bar.

"*Mais cela me rend folle,*" she murmured.

"Do you know the air? It's the 'Bridge of Lodi,' and we are to dance 'Britannia's Triumph' to it. Come, Mademoiselle, since the 'Triumph' is nicely mixed, let your captive lead you."

Those were days of reels, poussettes, ladies' chains, and figure dancing; honest heel-and-toe, hopping and twisting, hands across and down the middle—an art contemned now, worse than neglected, insulted by the vulgar caricature of "kitchen lancers"; but then seriously practised, delighting the eye, bringing blood to the dancers' cheeks. For five minutes and more Dorothea was entirely happy. M. Raoul—himself no mean performer—tasted, after his first surprise, something of the joy of discovery. Who could have guessed that this quiet spinster, who, as a rule, held herself and walked so

awkwardly, would prove the best partner in the room? He had not the least doubt of it. Others danced with more abandonment, with more exuberant vigour—"romped" was his criticism—but none with such *élan*, perfectly restrained, covering precision with grace. Hands across, cast off and wheel; as their fingers met again he felt the tense nerves, the throb of the pulse beneath the glove. Her lips were parted, her eyes and whole face animated. She was not thinking of him, or of anyone; only of the swing and beat of the music, the sway of life and colour, her own body swaying to it, enslaved to the moment and answering no other call.

"I understand why they call it the 'Triumph,'" he murmured, as he led her back to her seat. She turned her eyes on him as one coming out of a dream.

"I have never enjoyed a dance so much in my life," she said seriously.

He laughed.

"It must have been an inspiration—" he began, and checked himself, with a glance over his shoulder at the painted panel behind them.

"You were saying—" She looked up after a moment.

"Nothing. Listen to the Ting-tang!" He drew aside one of the orange curtains, and Dorothea heard

the note of a bell clanging in a distant street. "Time for all good prisoners to be in bed, and Heaven temper the wind to the thin blanket! It is snowing—snowing furiously."

"Do they suffer much in these winters?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"They die sometimes, though your brother does his best to prevent it. It promises to be a hard season for them."

"I wish I could help; but Endymion—but my brother does not approve of ladies mixing themselves up in these affairs."

"Yet he has carried off half-a-dozen to the supper-room, where at a side table three of my compatriots are vending knick-knacks, to add a little beef to their *ragoûts*."

"Is it that which has annoyed General Rochambeau?"

She had recognised the phrase, but let it pass.

"It is."

She understood. For some reason her brain was unusually clear to-night. At any other time she would have defended, or at least excused, her brother. She knew it, and found time to wonder at her new practicality as she answered:

"I must think of some way to help."

She saw his brow clear—saw that she had risen in his esteem—and was glad.

"To *you*, Mademoiselle, we shall find it easy to be grateful."

"By helping them," she explained, "I may also be helping my brother. You do not understand him as I do, and you sharpen your wit upon him."

"Be assured it does not hurt him, Mademoiselle."

"No, but it hurts *me*."

He bowed gravely.

"It shall not hurt you again. Whom you love, you shall protect."

"Ah! M. Raoul!" Endymion Westcote hailed him from the doorway and crossed the room with Narcissus in tow. "My brother is interested in your panel of Bacchus and Ariadne; he will be glad to discuss it with you. Br-r-r-!"—he shivered—"I have been down to the door, and it is snowing viciously. Some of our friends will hardly find their homes to-night. I hope, by the way, you have brought a great-coat?"

Raoul ignored the question.

"I fear, sir, your learning will discover half-a-dozen mistakes," said he, addressing Narcissus and leading the way towards the panel.

"But whilst I think of it," Endymion persisted, "I saw half-a-dozen old baize chair-covers behind the cloak-room door. Don't hesitate to take one; you can return it to-morrow or next day." Dorothea

being his only audience, he beamed a look on her which said: "They come to us in a hurry, these prisoners—no time to collect a wardrobe; but *I* think of these little things."

"Rest assured, sir, I will turn up my coat-collar," said Raoul; and Dorothea could see him, a moment later, shaking his head good-naturedly, though the Commissary still protested.

Dorothea, left to herself, watched them examining and discussing the panel of Bacchus and Ariadne. The orchestra started another *contre-danse*, but no partner approached to claim her. The dance began. It was the "Dashing White Sergeant," and one exuberant couple threatened to tread upon her toes. She stood up and, for lack of anything better to do, began to study the panel behind her.

A moment later her hand went up to her throat.

It was the panel on which M. Raoul had sketched an imaginary board with his thumb-nail—the Garden of the Hesperides. But the Perseus was different; he wore the face of M. Raoul himself. And beneath the throat of the nymph on the right, half concealed in the folds about her bosom, hung a locket—a small enamelled heart, edged with brilliants. Just such a trinket—a brooch—had pinned the collar of her close habit three days before, when she and M. Raoul had stood together discussing the panel. It was a legacy from her mother.

Hastily she put out a hand and drew the edge of the orange curtain over nymph and locket.

Soon after supper Endymion Westcote informed his sister that it was hopeless to think of returning to Bayfield. The barouche would convey her back to the Town House ; but already the snow lay a foot and a half deep, and was still falling. He himself, after packing her off with Narcissus, would remain and attend to the comfort of the guests, many of whom must bivouac at " The Dogs " for the night as best they could.

At midnight, or a little later, the barouche was announced. It drew up close to the porch, axle-deep in snow. Upstairs the orchestra was sawing out the strains of " Major Malley's Reel," as Endymion lifted his sister in and slammed the door upon her and Narcissus. The noise prevented his hearing a sash-window lifted, immediately above the porch.

" Right away ! "

The inn-servant who had accompanied the Westcotes turned back to trim a candle flaring in the draughty passage. But it so happened that, in starting, the coachman entangled his off-rein in the trace-buckle. Endymion, in his polished hessians, ran round to unhitch it.

On the window-sill above, two deft hands quickly scooped up and moulded a snowball.

"He should turn up his coat-collar, the pig! *V'lan pour le Commissaire!*"

Endymion Westcote did not hear the voice; but as the vehicle rolled heavily forward, out of the darkness a snowball struck him accurately on the nape of the neck.

CHAPTER IV.

ENCOUNTER BETWEEN A HIGH HORSE AND A HOBBY.

"YOUR chocolate will be getting cold, Miss."

Dorothea, refreshed with sleep but still pleasantly tired, lay in bed watching Polly as she relaid and lit the fire in the massive Georgian grate. These occasions found the service in the Town House short-handed, and the girl (a cheerful body, with no airs) turned to and took her share in the extra work.

"Have they sent for Mudge?" (Mudge was the Bayfield butler.)

"Lord, no, Miss! Small chance of getting to Mudge, or of Mudge getting to us. Why, the snow is half-way up the front door!"

Bed was deliciously warm, and the air in the room nipping, as Dorothea found when she stretched out her hand for the cup.

"I always like waking in this room. It gives one a sort of betwixt and between feeling—between being at home and on a visit. To be snowed-up makes it quite an adventure."

"Pretty adventure for the gentry at 'The Dogs'! Tom Ryder, the dairyman there, managed to struggle across just now with the milk, and he says that a score of them couldn't get beds in the town for love or money. The rest kept it up till four in the morning, and now they're sleeping in their fine dresses round the fire in the Orange Room."

Dorothea laughed. "They were caught like this just eighteen years ago—let me see—yes, just eighteen. I remember, because it was my second ball. But then there were no prisoners filling up the lodgings, so everyone found a room."

"Some of the French gentlemen gave up their lodgings last night, and are down at 'The Dogs' now keeping themselves warm. There's that old Admiral, for one. I'm sure he never ought to be out of bed, with his rheumatics. It's enough to give him his death. Sam Zeally says that General Rochambeau is looking after him, as tender as a mother with a babby."

Polly mimicked Sam's pronunciation, and laughed. She was Somerset-born herself, but had seen service in Bath.

"Where is Mr. Endymion?"

"I heard him let himself in just as I was going upstairs after undressing you. That would be about one, or a quarter past. But he was up again at six, called for Mrs. Morrish to heat his shaving water,

and had a cup of coffee in his room. He and Mr. Narcissus have gone out to see the roll called, and get the volunteers and prisoners to clear the streets. Leastways, that's what Mr. Narcissus is doing. I heard Mr. Endymion say something about riding off to see what the roads are like."

By this time the fire was lit and crackling. Polly loitered awhile, arranging the cinders. She had given up asking with whom her mistress had danced; but Dorothea usually described the more striking gowns, and how this or that lady had worn her hair.

"Tired, Miss?"

"Well, yes, Polly; a little, but not uncomfortably. I danced several times last night."

Polly pursed her mouth into an O; but her face was turned to the fire, and Dorothea did not see it.

"I hope, Miss, you'll tell me about it later on. But Mrs. Morrish is downstairs declaring that no hen will lay an egg in this weather, to have it snowed up the next moment. 'Not that I blame mun,' she says, 'for I wouldn't do it myself,'"—here Polly giggled. "What to find for breakfast she don't know, and never will until I go and help her."

Polly departed, leaving her mistress cosy in bed and strangely reluctant to rise and part company with her waking thoughts.

Yes; Dorothea had danced twice again with

M. Raoul since her discovery of his boldness. He had seen her draw the orange curtain over his offence, had sought her again and apologised for it. He had done it (he had pleaded) on a sudden impulse—to be a reminder of one kind glance which had brightened his exile. No one but she was in the least likely to recognise the trinket; in any case he would paint it out at the first opportunity. And Dorothea had forgiven him. She herself had a great capacity for gratitude, and understood the feeling far too thoroughly to believe for an instant that M. Raoul could be mightily grateful for anything she had said or done. No; whatever the feeling which impels a young gentleman to secrete some little private reminder of its object, it is not gratitude; and Dorothea rejoiced inwardly that it was not. But what then was it? Some attraction of sympathy, no doubt. To find herself attractive in any way was a new experience and delightful. She had forgiven him on the spot. And afterwards they had danced twice together, and he had praised her dancing. Also, he had said something about a pretty foot—but Frenchmen must always be complimenting.

A noise in the street interrupted her thoughts, and reminded her that she must not be dawdling longer in bed. She shut her teeth, made a leap for it, and, running to the window, peered over the

blind. Some score of the prisoners in a gang were clearing the pavement with shovels and brushes, laughing and chattering all the while and breaking off to pelt each other with snowballs. She had discussed these poor fellows with M. Raoul last night. Could she not in some way add to their comfort, or their pleasure? He had dwelt most upon their mental weariness, especially on Sundays. Of material discomfort they never complained, but they dreaded Sundays worse than they dreaded cold weather. Any small distraction now——

The train of her recollections came to a sudden halt, before a tall cheval-glass standing at an obtuse angle to the fireplace and on the edge of its broad hearth-rug. She had been moving aimlessly from the window to the wardrobe in which Polly had folded and laid away her last night's finery, and from the wardrobe back to a long sofa at the bed's foot. And now she found herself standing before the glass and holding her nightgown high enough to display a foot and ankle on which she had slipped an ash-coloured stocking and shoe. A tide of red flooded her neck and face.

* * * * * *

Mrs. Morrish had laid the meal in the ground-floor room, once a library, but now used as a bank-parlour—yet still preserving the dignified aspect of a private room: for banking (as the Westcote clients

were reminded by several sporting prints and a bust of the Medicean Venus) was in those days of scarce money a branch of philanthropy rather than of trade. The good caretaker was in tears over the breakfast. "And I'm sure, Miss, I don't know what's to be done unless you can eat bacon."

"Which I can," Dorothea assured her.

"Well, Miss, I am sure I envy you; for ever since that poor French Captain Fioupi hanged himself from Mary Odling's bacon-rack, two years ago the first of this very next month, I haven't been able to look at a bit."

"Poor gentleman! Why did he do it?"

"The Lord knows, Miss. But they said it was home-sickness."

From the street came the voices of Captain Fioupi's compatriots, merry at their work. Dorothea had scarcely begun breakfast before her brothers entered, and she had to pour out tea for them. Narcissus took his seat at once. Endymion stood stamping his feet and warming his hands by the fire. He bent down, and with his finger flicked out a crust of snow from between his breeches and the tops of his riding-boots. It fell on the hearthstone and sputtered.

"The roads," he announced, "are not so very bad beyond the bridge. That is the worst spot, and I have sent down a gang to clear it. Our guests

ought to be able to depart before noon, though I won't answer for the road Yeovil way. One carrier —Allworthy—has come through to the bridge, but says he passed Solomon's van in a drift about four miles back, this side of the Cheriton oak. He reports Bayfield Hill safe enough; but that I discovered for myself."

"It seems quite a treat for them," Dorothea remarked.

His eyebrows went up.

"The guests, do you mean?"

He turned to the fire and picked up the tongs.

She laughed.

"No, I mean the prisoners; I was listening to their voices. Just now they were throwing snowballs."

Endymion dropped the tongs with a clatter; picked them up, set them in place, and faced the room again with a flush which might have come from stooping over the fire.

"Come to breakfast, dear," said Dorothea, busy with the tea-urn. "I have a small plan I want your permission for, and your help. It's about the prisoners. General Rochambeau and M. Raoul——"

"Are doubtless prepared to teach me my business," snapped Endymion, who seemed in bad humour this morning.

"No—but listen, dear! They praise you warmly. For whom but my brother would these poor men have worked as they did upon the Orange Room—and all to show their gratitude? But it appears that the worst part of captivity is its tedium and the way it depresses the mind; one sees that it must be. They dread Sundays most of all. And I said I would speak to you, and if any way could be found——"

"My dear Dorothea," Endymion slipped his hands beneath his coat-tails and stood astraddle, "I have not often to request you to mind your own affairs; but really when it comes to making a promise in my name——"

"Not a promise."

"May I ask you if you seriously propose to familiarise Axcester with all the orgies of a Continental Sabbath? Already the prisoners spend Sunday in playing chess, draughts, cards, dominoes; practices which I connive at, only insisting that they are kept out of sight, but from which I endeavour to wean them—those at least who have a taste for music—by encouraging them to take part in our Church services."

"But I have heard you regret, dear, that only the least respectable fall in with this. The rest, being strict Roman Catholics, think it wrong."

"Are you quite sure last night did not over-tire

you? You are certainly disposed to be argumentative this morning."

"I think," suggested Narcissus, buttering his toast carefully, "you might at least hear what Dorothea has to say."

"Oh, certainly! Indeed, if she has been committing me to her projects, I have a right to know the worst."

"I haven't committed you—I only said I would ask your advice," poor Dorothea stammered. "And I have no project." She caught Narcissus' eye, and went on a little more firmly: "Only I thought, perhaps, that if you extended their walks a little on Sundays—they are scrupulous in keeping their *parole*. And, once in a way, we might entertain them at Bayfield—late in the afternoon, when you have finished your Sunday nap. Narcissus might show them the pavement and tell them about Vespasian—not a regular lecture, it being Sunday, but an informal talk, with tea afterwards. And in the evening, perhaps, they might meet in the Orange Room for some sacred music—it need not be called a 'concert'—" Dorothea stopped short, amazed at her own inventiveness.

"H'm. I envy your simplicity, my dear soul, in believing that the—ah—alleged *ennui* of these men can be cured by a talk about Vespasian. But when you go on to talk of sacred music, I must be per-

mitted to remind you that a concert is none the less a concert for being called by another name. We Britons do not usually allow names to disguise facts. A concert—call it even a 'sacred' concert—in the Orange Room, amid those distinctly—ah—pagan adornments! I can scarcely even term it the thin end of the wedge, so clearly can I see it paving the way for other questionable indulgences. I don't doubt your good intentions, Dorothea, but you cannot, as a woman, be expected to understand how easily the best intentions may convert Axcester, with its French community, into a veritable hot-bed of vice. And, by-the-by, you might tell Morrish I shall want the horse again in half-an-hour's time."

Dorothea left the room on her errand. As she closed the door Narcissus looked up from his toast.

"Hot-bed of fiddle-sticks!" said he.

"I—ah—beg your pardon?"

Endymion, in the act of seating himself at table, paused to stare.

"Hot-bed of fiddle-sticks!" repeated Narcissus. "You needn't have snapped Dorothea's head off. *I* thought her suggestions extremely sensible."

"The concert, for instance?"

"Yes! you don't make sacred music irreverent by calling it a concert. Moreover, I really don't see why, as intelligent men, they should not find

Vespasian interesting. His career in many respects resembled the Corsican's."

Endymion smiled at his plate.

"Well, well, we will talk about it later on," said he.

He never quarrelled with Narcissus, whose foibles amused him, but for whose slow judgment he had a more than brotherly respect.

* * * * * *

The Westcotes, though (at due intervals and with due notice given) they entertained as handsomely as the Lord Lieutenant himself, were not a household to be bounced (so to speak) into promiscuous or extemporised hospitality. For an ordinary dinner-party, Dorothea would pen the invitations three weeks ahead, Endymion devote an hour to selecting his guests, and Narcissus spend a morning in the Bayfield cellar, which he supervised and in which he took a just pride. And so well was this inelasticity recognised, so clearly was it understood that by no circumstances could Endymion Westcote permit himself to be upset, that none of the snowed-up company at "The Dogs" thought a bit the worse of him for having gone home and left them to shift as best they could.

Dorothea, when at about half-past ten she put on her bonnet and cloak and stepped down to visit them—the prisoners having by that time cleared

the pavement—found herself surrounded by a crew humorously apologetic for their toilets, profoundly envious of her better luck, but on excellent terms with one another and—the younger ones, at any rate, who had borne the worst of the discomfort—enjoying the adventure thoroughly.

"But the life and soul of it all was that M. Raoul," confessed Lady Bateson's niece.

"By George!" echoed the schoolboy who had danced the "Soldier's Joy" with Dorothea, "I wouldn't have believed it of a Frenchy."

For some reason Dorothea was not too well pleased.

"But I do not see M. Raoul."

"Oh, he's down by the bridge, helping the relief party. One would guess him worn out. He ran from lodging to lodging, turning the occupants out of their beds and routing about for fresh linen. They say he even carried old Mrs. Kekewich pick-a-back through the snow."

"And tucked her in bed," added the schoolboy. "And then he came back, wet almost to the waist, and danced."

He looked roguishly at Lady Bateson's niece, and the pair exploded in laughter.

They ran off as General Rochambeau, jaded and unshaven, approached and saluted Dorothea.

"Until Miss Westcote appeared, we held our own

against the face of day. Now, alas! the conspiracy can no longer be kept up."

"You had no compliment for me last night, General."

"Forgive me, Mademoiselle." He lowered his voice and spoke earnestly. "I have a genuine one for you to-day—I compliment your heart. M. Raoul has told me of your interest in our poor compatriots, and what you intend——"

"I fear I can do little," Dorothea interrupted, mindful of her late encounter and (as she believed) defeat. "By all accounts, M. Raoul appears to have made himself agreeable to all," she added.

The old gentleman chuckled and took snuff.

"He loves an audience. At about four in the morning, when all the elders were in bed—(pardon me, Mademoiselle, if I claim to reckon myself among *les jeunes;* my poor back tells me at what cost)—at about four in the morning the young lady who has just left you spoke of a new dance she had seen performed this season at Bath. Well, it appears that M. Raoul had also seen it—a valtz they called it, or some such name. Whereupon nothing would do but they must dance it together. Such a dance, Mademoiselle! Roll, roll—round and round—roll, roll—but *perpendicularly*, you understand. By-and-by the others began to copy them and someone asked M. Raoul where he had found this accomplishment.

'Oh, in my travels,' says he, and points to one of the panels; and there, if you will believe me, the fellow had actually painted himself as Perseus in the Garden of the Hesperides."

Poor Dorothea glanced towards the panel.

"Ah, you remember it! But he must have painted in the face after showing it to us the other day, or I should have recognised it at the time. You must come and see it; really an excellent portrait!"

He led her towards it. The orange curtain no longer hid the third nymph. But the blood which had left Dorothea's face rushed back as she saw that the trinket had been roughly erased.

"It was quite a *coup*, but M. Raoul loves an audience."

Shortly before noon the road by the bridge was reported to be clear. Carriages were announced, and the guests shook hands and were rolled away—the elder glum, their juniors in boisterous spirits. As each carriage passed the bridge, where M. Raoul stood among the workmen, handkerchiefs fluttered out, and he lifted his hat gaily in response.

CHAPTER V.

BEGINS WITH ANCIENT HISTORY AND ENDS WITH AN OLD STORY.

"*Ubicunque vicit Romanus habitat*,—Where the Roman conquered he settled—and it is from his settlements that to-day we deduce his conquests. Of Vespasian and his second legion the jejune page of Suetonius records neither where they landed nor at what limit their victorious eagles were stayed. Yet will the patient investigator trace their footprints across many a familiar landscape of rural England, led by the blurred imperishable impress he has learned to recognise. The invading host sweeps forward, and is gone ; but behind it the homestead arises and smiles upon the devastated fields, arms yield to the implements and habiliments of peace, and the colonist who supersedes the legionary, in time furnishes the sole evidence of his feverish and ensanguined transit."

Narcissus was enjoying himself amazingly. His audience endured him because the experience was new, and their ears caught the rattle of tea-cups in the adjoining library.

Dorothea sat counting her guests, and assuring herself that the number of tea-cups would suffice. She had heard the lecture many times before, and with repetition its sonorous periods had lost hold upon her, although her brother had been at pains to model them upon Gibbon.

But the scene impressed her sharply, and she carried away a very lively picture of it. The old Roman villa had been built about a hollow square open to the sky, and this square now formed the great hall of Bayfield. Deep galleries of two stories surrounded it, in place of the old colonnaded walk. Out of these opened the principal rooms of the house, and above them, upon a circular lantern of clear glass, was arched a painted dome. Sheathed on the outside with green weather-tinted copper, and surmounted by a gilt ball, this dome (which could be seen from the Axcester High Street when winter stripped the Bayfield elms) gave the building something of the appearance of an observatory.

On the north side of the hall a broad staircase descended from the gallery to the tiled floor, in the midst of which a fountain played beneath a cupola supported by slender columns. On the west the recess beneath the gallery had been deepened to admit a truly ample fireplace, with a flat hearthstone and andirons. Here were screens and rich turkey rugs, and here the Bayfield household ordinarily had the

lamps set after dinner and gathered before the fire, talking little, enjoying the long pauses filled with the hiss of logs and the monotonous drip and trickle of water in the penumbra.

To-day the prisoners—two hundred in all—crowded the floor, the stairs, even the deep gallery above; but on the south side, facing the staircase, two heavy curtains had been looped back from the *atrium*, and there a ray of wintry sunshine fell through the glass roof upon the famous Bayfield pavement and the figure of Narcissus gravely expounding it.

He had reached his peroration, and Dorothea, who knew every word of it by heart, was on the alert. At its close the audience held their breath for a second or two, and then—satisfied, as their hostess rose, that he had really come to an end—tendered their applause, and, breaking into promiscuous chatter, trooped towards the tea-room. Narcissus lingered, with bent head, oblivious, silently repeating the last well-worn sentences while he conned his beloved *tessellæ*.

A voice aroused him from his brown study; he looked up, to find the hall deserted and M. Raoul standing at his elbow.

"Will you remember your promise, Monsieur, and allow me to examine a little more closely? Ah, but it is wonderful! That Pentheus! And the Maenad there, carrying the torn limb! Also the

border of vine-leaves and crossed thyrsi; though that, to be sure, is usual enough. And this next? Ah, I remember—'*Tu cum parentis regna per arduum*'; but what a devil of a design! And, above all, what mellowness! You will, I know, pardon the enthusiasm of one who comes from the Provence, a few miles out of Arles, and whose mother's family boasts itself to be descended from Roman colonists."

Narcissus beamed.

"To you then, M. Raoul, after your Forum and famous Amphitheatre, our pavement must seem a poor trifle; though it by no means exhausts our list of interesting remains. The *præfurnium*, for instance; I must show you our *præfurnium!*"

"The house would be remarkable anywhere—even in my own Provence—so closely has it kept the original lines. In half-an-hour one could reconstruct——"

"Ay!" chimed in the delighted Narcissus. "You shall try, M. Raoul, you shall try! I promise to catch you tripping."

"Yonder runs the Fosse Way, west by south. The villa stands about two hundred yards back from it, facing the south-east——"

"A little east of south. The outer walls did not run exactly true with the enclosed quadrangle."

"You say that the front measured two hundred

feet, perhaps a little over. Clearly, then, it was a domain of much importance, and the granaries, mills, stables, slaves' dwellings would occupy much space about it—an acre and a half, at least."

"Portions of a brick foundation were unearthed no less than three hundred yards away. A hypocaust lay embedded among them, much broken but recognisable."

"What puzzles me," mused M. Raoul, "is how these southern settlers managed to endure the climate."

"But that is explicable." Narcissus was off now, in full cry. "The trees, my dear sir, the trees! I have not the slightest doubt that our Bayfield elms are the ragged survivors of an immense forest—a forest which covered the whole primaeval face of Somerset on this side of the fens, and through which Vespasian's road-makers literally hewed their way. Given these forests—which, by the way, extended over the greater part of England—we must infer a climate totally unlike ours of this present day, damper perhaps, but milder. Within his belt of trees the colonist, secure from the prevailing winds, would plant a garden to rival your gardens of the South—'*primus vere rosam atque autumno carpere poma.*'"

"Yes," added M. Raoul, taking fire; "and perhaps a plant of helichryse or a rose-cutting from Paestum,

to twine about the house-pillars and comfort his exile."

"M. Raoul?" Dorothea's voice interrupted them. She stood by the looped curtain and reproached Narcissus with a look. "He has had no tea yet; it was cruel of you to detain him. My brother, sir," she turned to Raoul, "has no conscience when once set going on his hobby; for, of course, you were discussing the pavement?"

"We were talking, Mademoiselle, at that moment of the things which brighten and comfort exile."

She lowered her eyes, conscious of a blush, and half angry that it would not be restrained.

"And I was talking of tea, if that happens to be one of them," she replied, forcing a laugh.

"Well, well," said Narcissus, "take M. Raoul away and give him his tea; but he must come with me afterwards, while there is light, and we will go over the site together. I must fetch my map."

He hurried across the hall.

"Come, M. Raoul," said Dorothea, stepping past her guest and leading the way, "by a small *détour* we can reach that end of the library which is least crowded."

He followed without lifting his eyes, apparently lost in thought. The *atrium* on this side opened on a corridor which crossed the front door, and was closed by a door at either end—the one admitting

to the service rooms, the other to the library. Flat columns relieved the blank wall of this passage, with monstrous copies of Raphael's cartoons filling the interspaces; on the other hand four tall windows, two on either side of the door, looked out upon the *porte cochère*, the avenue, and the rolling hills beyond Axcester. By one of these windows M. Raoul halted—and Dorothea halted too, slightly puzzled.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, but there is one thing your brother forgets! What became of his happy colonists in the end? He told us that early in the fifth century the Emperor Honorius—was it not?—withdrew his legions, and wrote that Britain must henceforth look after itself. I listened for the end of the story, but your brother did not supply it. Yet sooner or later one and the same dreadful fate must have overtaken all these pleasant scattered homes—sack and fire and slaughter—slaughter for all the men, for the women slavery and worse. Does one hear of any surviving? Out of this warm life into silence—" He paused and shivered. "Very likely they did not guess for a long while. Look, Mademoiselle, at the Fosse Way, stretching yonder across the hills: figure yourself a daughter of the old Roman homestead standing here and watching the little cloud of dust that meant the retreating column, the last of your protection. You would not guess what it meant—you, to whom each day has brought

its restful round; who have lived only to be good and reflect the sunshine upon all near you. And I—your slave, suppose me, standing beside you—might guess as little."

He took a step and touched her hand. His face was still turned to the window.

"Time! time!" he went on in a low voice, charged with passion. "It eats us all! Brr—how I hate it! How I hate the grave! There lies the sting, Mademoiselle—the torture to be a captive: to feel one's best days slipping away, and fate still denying to us poor devils the chance which even the luckiest—God knows—find little enough." He laughed, and to Dorothea the laugh sounded passing bitter. "You will not understand how a man feels; how even so unimportant a creature as I must bear a sort of personal grudge against his fate."

"I am trying to understand," said Dorothea, gently.

"But this you can understand, how a prisoner loves the sunshine: not because, through his grating, it warms him; but because it *is* the sunshine, and he sees it. Mademoiselle, I am not grateful; I see merely, and adore. Some day you shall pause by this window and see a cloud of dust on the Fosse Way—the last of us prisoners as they march us from Axcester to the place of our release; and, seeing it, you shall close the book upon a chapter, but not

without remembering "—he touched her hand again, but now his fingers closed on it, and he raised it to his lips,—" not without remembering how and when one Frenchman said, ' God bless you, Mademoiselle Dorothea ! ' "

Dorothea's eyes were wet when, a moment later, Narcissus came bustling through the *atrium* with a roll of papers in his hand.

" Ah, this is luck ! " he cried. " I was starting to search for you."

He either assumed that they had visited the tea-room or forgot all about it ; and M. Raoul's look implored Dorothea not to explain.

" Suppose we take the *triclinium* first, on the north side of the house. That, sir, will tell you whether I am right or wrong about the climate of those days. A summer parlour facing north, and with no trace of heating-flues ! . . ."

He led off his captive, and Dorothea heard his expository tones gather volume as the pair crossed the great hall beneath the dome. Then she turned the handle of the library door, and was instantly deafened by the babel within.

The guests took their departure a little before sunset. M. Raoul was not among the long train which shook hands with her and filed down the avenue at the heels of M. de Tocqueville and General Rochambeau. Twenty minutes later, while the

servants were setting the hall in order, she heard her brother's voice beneath the window of her boudoir, explaining the system on which the Romans warmed their houses.

She had picked up a religious book, but found herself unable to fix her attention upon it or even to sit still. Her hand still burned where M. Raoul's lips had touched it. She recalled Endymion's prophecy that these entertainments would throw the domestic mechanism—always more delicately poised on Sundays than on weekdays—completely off its pivot. She had pledged herself to prevent this, and had made a private appeal to the maidservants with whose Sunday-out they interfered. They had responded loyally. Still, this was the first experiment; she would go down to the hall again and make sure that the couches were in position, the cushions shaken up, the pot-plants placed around the fountain so accurately that Endymion's nice eye for small comforts could detect no excuse for saying, "I told you so."

As she passed along the gallery her eyes sought the pillar beside which M. Raoul had stood during the lecture. By the foot of it a book lay face downwards—a book cheaply bound between boards of mottled paper. She picked it up and read the title; it was a volume of Rousseau's *Confessions*—a book of which she remembered to have heard. On

the flyleaf was written the owner's name in full—"Charles Marie Fabien de Raoul."

Dorothea hurried downstairs with it and past the servants tidying the hall. She looked to find M. Raoul still button-holed and held captive by Narcissus at the eastern angle of the house. But before she reached the front door she happened—though perhaps it was not quite accidental—to throw a glance through the window by which he had stood and talked with her, and saw him striding away down the avenue in the dusk.

She returned to her room and summoned Polly.

"You know M. Raoul? He has left, forgetting this book, which belongs to him. Run down to the small gate, that's a good girl—you will overtake him easily, since he is walking round by the avenue—and return it, with my compliments."

Polly picked up her skirts and ran. A narrow path slanted down across the slope of the park to the nurseries—a sheltered corner in which the Bayfield gardener grew his more delicate evergreens—and here a small wicket-gate opened on the high road.

The gate stood many feet above the road, which descended the hill between steep hedges. She heard M. Raoul's footstep as she reached it, and, peering over, saw him before he caught sight of her; indeed, he had almost passed without looking up when she hailed him.

"Holloa!" He swung almost right-about and smiled up pleasantly. "Is it highway robbery? If so, I surrender."

Polly laughed, showing a fine set of teeth.

"I'm 'most out of breath," she answered. "You've left your book behind, and my mistress sent it after you with her compliments." She held it above the gate.

He sprang up the bank towards her.

"And a pretty book, too, to be found in your hands! You haven't been reading it, I hope."

"La, no! Is it wicked?"

"Much depends on where you happen to open it. Now if your sweetheart——"

"Who told you I had one?"

"Tut-tut-tut! What's his name?"

"Well, if you must know, I'm walking out with Corporal Zeally. But what are you doing to the book?" For M. Raoul had taken out a penknife and was slicing out page after page—in some places whole blocks of pages together.

"When I've finished, I'm going to ask you to take it back to your mistress; and then no doubt you'll be reading it on the sly. Here, I must sit down: suppose you let me perch myself on the top bar of the gate. Also, it would be kind of you to put up an arm and prevent my overbalancing."

"I shouldn't think of it."

"Oh, very well!" He climbed up, laid the book on his knee and went on slicing. "I particularly want her to read M. Rousseau's reflections on the Pont du Gard; but I don't seem to have a book marker, unless you lend me a lock of your hair."

"Were you the gentleman she danced with, at 'The Dogs,' the night of the snowstorm?"

"The Pont du Gard, my dear, is a Roman antiquity, and has nothing to do with dancing. If, as I suppose, you refer to the 'Pont de Lodi,' that is a totally different work of art."

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean."

"And I don't intend that you shall." He cut a small strip of braid from his coat, inserted it for a bookmarker, and began to fold away the excised pages. "That's why I am keeping these back for my own perusal, and perhaps Corporal Zeally's."

"Do you know him?" She reached up to take the book he was holding out in his left hand, and the next instant his right arm was round her neck and he had kissed her full on the lips. "Oh, you wretch!" she cried, breaking free; and laughed, next moment, as he nearly toppled off the gate.

"Know him? Why, of course I do." M. Raoul was reseating himself on his perch, when he happened to throw a look down into the road, and at once broke into immoderate laughter. "Talk of the wolf——"

Polly screamed and ran. Below, at a bend of the

road, stood a stoutish figure in the uniform of the Axcester Volunteers—scarlet, with white facings. It was Corporal Zeally, very slowly taking in the scene.

M. Raoul skipped off the gate and stepped briskly past him. "Good-evening, Corporal! We're both of us a little behind time, this evening!" said he as he went by.

The Corporal pivoted on his heels and stared after him.

"Dang my living buttons!" he said, reflectively. "Couldn't even wait till my back was turned, but must kiss the maid under my nose!" He paused and rubbed his chin. "Her looked like Polly and her zounded like Polly. . . . Dang this dimpsey old light, I've got a good mind to run after 'n and ax 'n who 'twas!" He took a step down the hill, but thought better of it. "No, I won't," he said; "I'll go and ax Polly."

CHAPTER VI.

FATE IN A LAURELLED POST-CHAISE.

All the tongues of Rumour agreed that the Bayfield entertainment had been a success, and Endymion Westcote received many congratulations upon it at the next meeting of magistrates.

"Nonsense, nonsense!" he protested lightly. "One must do something to make life more tolerable to the poor devils, and 'pon my word 'twas worth it to see their gratitude. They behaved admirably. You see, two-thirds of them are gentlemen, after a fashion; not, perhaps, quite in the sense in which *we* understand the word, but then the—ah—modicum of French blood in my veins counteracts, I dare say, some little insular prejudices."

"My dear fellow, about such men as de Tocqueville and Rochambeau there can be no possible question."

"Ah! I'm extremely glad to hear you say so. I feared, perhaps, the way they managed their table-napkins——"

"Not at all. I was thinking rather of your bold

attitude towards Sunday observance. What does Milliton say ? "

Endymion's eyebrows went up. Mr. Milliton was the vicar of Axcester and the living lay in the Westcotes' gift. " I am not—ah—aware that I consulted Milliton. On such questions I recognise no responsibility save to my own conscience. He has not been complaining, I trust ? "

" Not to my knowledge."

" Ah ! " Endymion looked as if Mr. Milliton had better not. " I take, you must know, a somewhat broad view on such matters—may I, without offence, term it a liberal one ? As a matter of fact I intend going yet farther in the direction and granting permission for a small *réunion* on Sunday evenings at ' The Dogs,' when selections of purely sacred music will be performed. I shall, of course, deprecate the name ' concert ' ; and even ' performance ' may seem to carry with it some—ah—suggestions of a theatrical nature. But, as Shakespeare says, ' What's in a name ? ' Perhaps you can suggest a more suitable one ? "

" A broad-minded fellow," was the general verdict ; and some admirers added that ideas which in weaker men might seem to lean towards free thought, and even towards Jacobinism, became Mr. Westcote handsomely enough. He knew how to carry them off, to wear them lightly as flourishes and ornaments

of his robust common sense, and might be trusted not to go too far. Endymion, who had an exquisite *flair* for the approval of his own class, soon learned to take an honest pride in his liberalism and to enjoy its discreet display. "The entertainment at Bayfield was nothing—a private experiment only; the unfamiliar must be handled gently; a good rule to try it on your own household before tackling the world. As a matter of fact, old Narcissus had enjoyed it. But if the neighbouring families were really curious, and would promise not to be shocked, they must come to 'The Dogs' some Sunday evening: No, not next Sunday, but in a week or two's time when the prisoners, as intelligent fellows, would have grasped his notions."

Sure enough, on the third Sunday he brought a round dozen of guests; and the entrance of the Bayfield party (punctually five minutes late), and their solemn taking of seats in the two front rows, thereafter became a feature of these entertainments. On the first occasion the musicians stopped, out of respect, in the middle of a motet of Scarlatti's; but Endymion gave orders that in future this was not to be.

"I have been something of an amateur myself," he explained, "and know what is due to Art."

It vexed Dorothea to note that after the first two or three performances some of her best friends

among the prisoners absented themselves, General Rochambeau for one. Indeed, the General had taken to declining all invitations, and rarely appeared abroad. One March morning, meeting him in the High Street, she made bold to tax him with the change and ask his reasons.

The hour was eleven in the forenoon, the busiest of the day. In twenty minutes the London coach would be due with the mails, and this always brought the prisoners out into the street. The largest crowd gathered in front of "The Dogs," waiting to see the horses changed and the bags unloaded. But a second hung around the Post Office, where the Commissary received and distributed the prisoners' letters, while lesser groups shifted and moved about at the tail of the butchers' carts, and others laden with milk, eggs, and fresh vegetables from the country; for Axcester had now a daily market, and in the few minutes before the mail's arrival the salesmen drove their best trade.

General Rochambeau tapped his snuffbox meditatively, like a man in two minds. But he kept a sidelong eye upon Dorothea, as she turned to acknowledge a bow from the Vicomte de Tocqueville. The Vicomte, with an air of amused contempt, was choosing a steak for his dinner, using his gold-ferruled walking-stick to direct the butcher how to cut it out, while his servant stood ready with a plate.

"To tell you the truth, Mademoiselle, I find a hand at picquet with the Admiral less fatiguing for two old gentlemen than these public gaieties."

"In other words, you are nursing him. They tell me he has never been well since that night of the snowstorm."

"Your informants may now add that he is better; these few Spring days have done wonders for his rheumatism, and, indeed, he is dressed and abroad this morning."

"Which explains why you are willing to stop and chat with me, instead of hurrying off to the Post Office to ask for his letter—that letter which never comes."

"So M. Raoul has been telling you all about us?"

Dorothea blushed.

"He happened to speak of it, at one of my working parties——"

"He has a fine gift for the pathetic, that young man; oh, yes, and a pretty humour too! I can fancy what he makes of us—poor old Damon and Pythias—while he holds the skeins; with a smile for poor old Pythias' pigtail, and a tremor of the voice for the Emperor's *tabatière*, and a tear, no doubt, for the letter which never comes. M. Raoul is great with an audience."

"You do him injustice, General. An audience of half-a-dozen old women!"

General Rochambeau had an answer to this on his tongue, but repressed it.

"Ah, here comes the Admiral!" he cried, as the gaunt old man came shuffling down the street towards them, with his stoop, his cross-grained features drawn awry with twinges of rheumatism, his hands crossed above his tall cane. All Axcester laughed at his long blue surtout, his pigtail and little round hat. But Dorothea always found him formidable, and wanted to run away. "Admiral, I was just about to tell Miss Westcote that the time is come to congratulate her. Here is winter past—except that of two years ago, the hardest known in Axcester; and, thanks to her subscription lists and working parties, our countrymen have never gone so well fed and warmly clad."

"Which," growled the Admiral, "does not explain why no less than eight of them have broken their parole. An incredible, a shameful number!"

"As time goes on, Admiral, they grow less patient. Hope deferred——"

Ta-ra, tara-ra! Ta-ra, tara-ra-ra! The notes of the guard's horn broke in upon Dorothea's excuse. Groups scattered, market carts were hastily backed alongside the pavement, and down the mid-thoroughfare came the mail at a gallop, with crack of whip and rushing chime of bits and swingle-bars.

Dorothea watched the crowd closing round it as it

drew up by " The Dogs," and turned to note that the Admiral's face was pale and his eyes sought those of his old friend.

" Better leave it to me to-day, if Miss Westcote will excuse me."

General Rochambeau lifted his hat and hurried after the crowd.

Then Dorothea understood. The old man beside her had lost courage to pick up his old habit ; at the last moment his friend must go for the letter which never came. She cast about to say something ; her last words had been of hope deferred—it would not do to take up her speech there . . .

The Admiral seemed to meet her eyes with an effort. He put out a hand.

" It is not good, Mademoiselle, that a man should pity himself. Beware how you teach that ; beware how you listen to him then."

He turned from her abruptly and tottered away. Glancing aside, she met the Vicomte de Tocqueville's tired smile ; he was using his cane to prod the butcher and recall his attention to the half-cut steak. But the butcher continued to stare down the street.

" Eh ? But, dear me, it sounds like an *émeute*," said the Vicomte, negligently ; at the same time stepping to Dorothea's side.

The murmur of the crowd in front of " The Dogs " had been swelling, and now broke into sharp, angry

cries for a moment ; then settled into a dull roar, and rose in a hoarse *crescendo*. The mail coach was evidently not the centre of disturbance, though Dorothea could see its driver waving his arm and gesticulating from the box. The noise came ahead of it, some twenty yards lower down the hill, where the street had suddenly grown black with people pressing and swaying.

" There seems no danger here, whatever it is," said the Vicomte, glancing up at the house-front above.

" Please go and see what is the matter. I am safe enough," Dorothea assured him. " The folks in the house will give me shelter, if necessary."

The Vicomte lifted his hat. " I will return and report promptly, if the affair be serious."

But it was not serious. The tumult died down, and Dorothea with her riding-switch was guarding the half-cut steak from a predatory dog when the Vicomte and the butcher returned together.

" Reassure yourself, Miss Westcote," said M. de Tocqueville. " There has been no bloodshed, though bloodshed was challenged. It appears that almost as the coach drew up there arrived from the westward a post-chaise conveying a young naval officer from Plymouth, with despatches and (I regret to tell it) a flag. His Britannic Majesty has captured another of our frigates ; and the high-spirited young

gentleman was making the most of it in all innocence, and without an idea that his triumph could offend anyone in Axcester. Unfortunately, on his way up the street, he waved the captured tricolor under the nose of your brother's *protégé*, M. Raoul——"

"M. Raoul!" Dorothea caught her breath on the name.

"And M. Raoul leapt into the chaise, then and there wrested the flag from him—the more easily no doubt because he expected nothing so little—and holding it aloft, challenged him to mortal combat. Theatrically, and apart from the taste of it (I report only from hearsay), the *coup* must have been immensely successful. When I arrived, your brother was restoring peace, the young Briton holding out his hand—swearing he was sorry, begad! but how the deuce was he to have known?—and M. Raoul saving the situation, and still demanding blood with a face as long as an Alexandrine:

> 'Ce drapeau glorieux auquel, en sanglotant,
> Se prosternent affaisés vos membres, vétérans!'

'Vary sorry, damitol, shake hands, beg your pardon.'"

The Vicomte forgot his languor, and burlesqued the scene with real talent.

Dorothea, however, was not amused.

"You say my brother is at 'The Dogs,' Monsieur? I think I will go to him."

"You must allow me, then, to escort you."

"Oh, the street is quite safe. Your countrymen will not suspect *me* of exulting over their misfortunes."

"Nevertheless—" he insisted, and walked beside her.

A mixed crowd of French and English still surrounded the chaise, to which a couple of postboys were attaching the relay: the French no longer furious, now that an apology had been offered and the flag hidden, but silent and sulky yet; the English inclined to think the young lieutenant hardly served, not to say churlishly. Frenchmen might be thin-skinned; but war was war, and surely Britons had a right to raise three cheers for a victory. Besides he had begged pardon at once, and offered to shake hands like a gentleman—that is, as soon as he discovered whose feelings were hurt; for naturally the fisticuffs had come first, and in these Master Raoul had taken as good as he brought. As the Vicomte cleared a path for her to the porch, where Endymion stood shaking hands and bidding adieu, Dorothea caught her first and last glimpse of this traveller, who—without knowing it, without seeing her face to remember it, or even learning her name—was to deflect the slow current of her life, and

send it whirling down a strange channel, giddy, precipitous, to an end unguessed.

She saw a fresh-complexioned lad, somewhat flushed and red in the face, but of frank and pleasant features; dressed in a three-cornered cocked-hat, blue coat piped with white and gilt-buttoned, white breeches and waistcoat, and broad black sword-belt; a youngster of the sort that loves a scrimmage or a jest, but is better in a scrimmage than in a jest when the laugh goes against him. He was eying the chaise just now, and obviously cursing the hour in which he had decorated it with laurel. Yet on the whole in a trying situation he bore himself well.

"Ah, much obliged to you, Vicomte!" Endymion hailed the pair. "There has been a small misunderstanding, my dear Dorothea; not the slightest cause for alarm! Still, you had better pass through to the coffee-room and wait for me."

Dorothea dismissed M. de Tocqueville with a bow, passed into the dark passage and pushed open the coffee-room door.

Within sat a young man, his elbows on the table, and his face bowed upon his arms. His fingers convulsively twisted a torn scrap of bunting; his shoulders heaved. It was M. Raoul.

Dorothea paused in the doorway and spoke his name. He did not look up.

She stepped towards him.

"M. Raoul!"

A sob shook him. She laid a hand gently on his bowed head, on the dark wave of hair above his strong, shapely neck. She was full of pity, longing to comfort . . .

"M. Raoul!"

He started, gazed up at her, and seized her hand. His eyes swam with tears, but behind the tears blazed a light which frightened her. Yet—oh, surely!—she could not mistake it.

"Dorothea!"

He held both her hands now. He was drawing her towards him. She could not speak. The room swam; outside the window she heard the noise of starting hoofs, of wheels, of the English crowd hurrahing as the chaise rolled away. Her head almost touched M. Raoul's breast. Then she broke loose, as her brother's step sounded in the passage.

CHAPTER VII.

LOVE AND AN OLD MAID.

I PRAY you be gentle with Dorothea. Find, if you can, something admirable in this plain spinster keeping, at the age of thirty-seven, a room in her breast adorned and ready for first love; find it pitiful, if you must, that the blind boy should mistake his lodging; only do not laugh, or your laughter may accuse you in the sequel.

She had a most simple heart. Wonder filled it as she rode home to Bayfield, and by the bridge she reined up Mercury as if to take her bearings in an unfamiliar country. At her feet rushed the Axe, swollen by spring freshets; a bullfinch, wet from his bath, bobbed on the sandstone parapet, shook himself, and piped a note or two; away up the stream, among the alders, birds were chasing and courting; from above the Bayfield elms, out of spaces of blue, the larks' song fell like a din of innumerable silver hammers. Either new sense had been given her, or the rains had washed the land-

scape and restored obliterated lines, colours, meanings. The very leaves by the roadside were fragrant as flowers.

For the moment it sufficed to know that she was loved, and that she loved. She was no fool. At the back of all her wonder lay the certainty that in the world's eyes such love as hers was absurd ; that it must end where it began ; that Raoul could never be hers, nor she escape from a captivity as real as his. But, perhaps because she knew all this so certainly, she could put it aside. This thing had come to her : this happiness to which, alone, in darkness, depressed by every look into the mirror, by every casual proof that her brothers and intimates accepted the verdict as final, her soul had been loyal—a forgotten servant of a neglectful lord. In the silence of her own room, in her garden, in the quiet stir of household duties, and again during the long evenings while she sat knitting by the fire and her brothers talked, she had pondered much upon love and puzzled herself with many questions. She had watched girls and their lovers, wives and their husbands. Can love (she had asked) draw near and pass and go its way unrecognised ? She had conned the signs. Now the hour had come, and she had needed none of her learning—eyes, hands, and voice, she had known the authentic god.

And she knew that it was not absurd; she knew herself worthy of love's belated condescension—not Raoul's; for the moment she scarcely thought of Raoul; for the moment Raoul's image grew faint and indefinite in the glory of being loved. Instinct, too, thrust it into the background; for as Raoul grew definite so must his youth, his circumstances, the world's laughter, the barriers never to be overcome. But merely to be loved, and to rest in that knowledge awhile—here were no barriers. The thing had happened: it *was*: nothing could forbid or efface it.

Yet when she reached home, after forcing the astonished Mercury to canter up the entire length of Bayfield hill, she must walk straight to her room and study her face in the glass.

"It has happened to you—to you! Why has it not transfigured you?—but then people would guess. Your teeth stand out—well, not so very prominently—but they stand out, and that is why foreigners laugh at Englishwomen. Yes, it has happened to you; but why? how?"

It so happened that she must meet him the next day. Narcissus had engaged him to make drawings of the Bayfield pavement, a new series to supersede hers in an enlarged edition of the treatise. Every one of the *tessellæ* was to be drawn to scale, and she must meet him to-morrow in the library with her

brother and receive instructions, for she had promised to help in taking measurements.

When the time came, and she entered the library, she did not indeed dare to lift her eyes. But Narcissus, already immersed in calculations, scarcely looked up from his paper. "Ah, there you are! Have you brought the India-ink?" he asked, and after a minute she marvelled at her own self-possession. Even when he left them to work out the measurements together (and it flashed upon her that henceforth they would often be left together, her immunity being taken for granted), she kept her head bowed over the papers and managed to control her voice to put one or two ordinary questions —until the pencil dropped from her fingers and she felt her hand imprisoned.

"Dorothea!"

"Oh, please, no!" she entreated hoarsely. "M. Raoul——!"

"Charles—" She attempted to draw her hand away; but, failing, lifted her eyes for mercy. They were sick and troubled. "Charles," he insisted.

"Charles, then." She relented, and he kissed her gaily. It was as if she drank in the kiss and, the next moment, recoiled from it. He released her hand and waited, watching her. She stood upright by the table, her shoulder turned to him, her

eyes gazing through the long window upon the green stretch of lawn. She was trembling slightly.

"It—it hurts like a wound," she murmured, and her hand went up to her breast. "But you must listen, please. You know—better than I—that this is the end. Oh, yes"—as he would have interrupted—"it is beautiful—for me. But I am old and you are a boy, and it is all quite silly. Please listen: even apart from this, it would be quite silly and could end nowhere."

He caught at her hand again, and she let it lie in his.

"Nowhere," she repeated, and, lifting her head, nodded twice. Her eyes were brimming.

"But if you love me?" he began.

She waited a moment, but he did not finish. "Ah! there it is, you see: you cannot finish. I was afraid to meet you to-day; but now I am glad, because we can talk about it once and for all. Charles"—she hesitated over the name—"dear, I have been thinking. Since we see this so clearly, it can be no treachery to my brothers to let our love stand where it does. At my age"—and Dorothea laughed nervously—"one is more easily contented than at yours."

"I cannot bear your talking in this way."

"Oh yes, you can," she assured him with a practical little nod. "I don't like it myself, but it has

to be done. Now in the first place, when we meet like this there must be no kissing." She blushed, while her voice wavered again over the word; then, as again his hand closed upon hers, she laughed. "Well—yes, you may kiss my hand. But I must not have it on my conscience that I am hiding from Endymion and Narcissus what they have a right to know. Of course they would be angry if they knew that I—that I was fond of you at all; but they would have no right, for they could not have forbidden or prevented it. Now if our prospects were what folks would call happier, why then in earnest of them you might kiss me, but then you would be bound to go to my brothers and tell them. But since it can all come to nothing—" A ghost of a smile finished the sentence.

"This war cannot last for ever."

"It seems to have lasted ever since I can remember. But what difference could its ending make? Ah, yes, then I should lose you!" she cried in dismay, but added with as sudden remorse: "Forgive my selfishness!"

"You are adorable," said he, and they laughed and picked up their pencils.

Dorothea's casuistry might prove her ignorant of love and its perils, as a child is of fire; but having, as she deemed, discovered the limits of her duty and set up her terms with Raoul upon them, she

soon developed a wonderful cunning in the art of being loved. Her plainness and the difference in their ages she took for granted, and subtly persuaded Raoul to take for granted; she had no affectations, no *minauderies;* by instinct she avoided setting up any illusion which he could not share; unconsciously and naturally she rested her strength on the maternal, protective side of love. Raoul came to her with his woes, his difficulties, his quarrel against fate; and she talked them over with him, and advised him almost as might a wise elder sister. She had read the *Confessions;* and, in spite of the missing pages, with less of fascination than disgust; yet had absorbed more than she knew. In Raoul she recognised certain points of likeness to his great countryman—points which had puzzled her in the book. Now the book helped her to treat them, though she was unaware of its help. Still less aware was she of any likeness between her and Madame de Warens, of whom (again in spite of the missing pages) she had a poor opinion.

The business of the drawings brought Raoul to Bayfield almost daily, and, as she had foreseen, they were much alone. After all, since it could end in nothing, the situation had its advantages; no one in the household gave it a thought, apparently. Dorothea was not altogether sure about Polly; once or twice she had caught Polly eying

her with an odd expression—once especially, when she had looked up as the girl was plaiting her hair, and their eyes met in the glass. And once again Dorothea had sent her to the library with a note of instructions left that morning by Narcissus, and, following a few minutes later, had found her standing and talking with M. Raoul in an attitude which, without being familiar, was not quite respectful.

"What was she saying?" her mistress asked, a moment or two later.

"Oh, nothing," he answered negligently. "I suppose that class of person cannot be troubled to show respect to prisoners."

That evening Dorothea rated the girl soundly for her pertness. "And I shall speak to Zeally," she threatened, "if anything of the kind happens again. If Mr. Endymion is to let you two have a house when you marry, and take in the Frenchmen as lodgers, he will want to know that you treat them respectfully."

Polly wept, and was forgiven.

April, May, June went by, and still Dorothea lived in her dream, troubled only by dread of the day which must bring her lover's task to an end, and, with it, his almost daily visits. Bit by bit she learned his story. He told her of Arles, his birthplace, with its Roman masonry and amphitheatre; of a turreted terraced château and a family of

aristocrats lording it among the vineyards; conspiring a little later with other noble families, entertaining them at secret meetings of the *Chiffonne*, where oaths were taken; later again, defending itself behind barricades of paving-stones; last of all, marched or carried in batches to the guillotine or the fusillade. He told of Avignon and its Papal Castle overhanging the Rhone, the city where he had spent his school days, and at the age of nine had seen Patriot L'Escuyer stabbed to death in the Cordeliers' Church with women's scissors; had seen Jourdan, the avenger, otherwise *Coupe-tête*, march flaming by at the head of his brave *brigands d'Avignon*. He told of the sequel, the hundred and thirty men, women and babes slaughtered in the dungeon of the *Glacière;* of Choisi's Dragoons and Grenadiers at the gates, and how, with roses scattered before them, they marched through the streets to the Castle, entered the gateway and paused, brought to a stand by the stench of putrefying flesh. He and his school mates had taken a holiday—their master being in hiding—to see the bodies lifted out. Also he had seen the search party ride out through the gates and return again, bringing Jourdan, with feet strapped beneath his horse's belly. He told of his journey to Paris—his purpose to learn to paint (at such a time!); of the great David, fat and wheezy, back at his easel, panting from civil blood-

shed; of the call to arms, his enlistment, his first campaign of 1805; of the foggy morning of Austerlitz, his wound, and the long hours he lay in the rear of a battery on the height of Pratzen, writhing, watching the artillerymen at work . . . and so on, with stories of marching and fighting, nights slept out by him at full length on the sodden turf beside his arms.

She had no history to tell him in exchange; she asked only to listen and to comfort. Yet so cleverly he addressed his story that the longest monologue became, by aid of a look or pressure of the hand, a conversation in which she, his guardian angel, bore her part. Did he talk of Avignon, for instance? It was the land of Laura and Petrarch, and she, seated with half-closed eyes beneath the Bayfield elms, saw the pair beside the waters of Vaucluse, saw the roses and orange-trees and arid plains of Provence, and wondered at the trouble in their spiritual love. *She* was not troubled; love as "a dureless content and a trustless joy" lay outside of her knowledge, and she had no desire to prove it. In this only she forgot the difference between Raoul's age and hers.

The day came when his work was ended. They spent a great part of that afternoon in the garden, now in the height of its midsummer glory. Raoul was very silent.

"But this must not end. It cannot end so!" he groaned once or twice.

He never forgot for long his old spite against Time.

"It will never end for me," she murmured.

"Of what are you made, then, that you look forward to living on shadows?—one would say, almost cheerfully! I believe you could be happy if you never saw me again!"

"Even if that had to be," she answered gravely, "while I knew you loved me I should never be quite unhappy. But you must find a way, while you can, to come sometimes; yes, you must come."

CHAPTER VIII.

CORPORAL ZEALLY INTERVENES.

DOROTHEA sat in the great hall of Bayfield, between the lamplight and the moonlight, listening to the drip of the fountain beneath its tiny cupola. A midsummer moon-ray fell through the uncurtained lantern beneath the dome and spread in a small pool of silver at her feet. Beneath one of the two shaded lamps Endymion lounged in his armchair and read the *Sherborne Mercury*. Narcissus had carried off the other to a table across the hall by the long book-case, and above the pot-plants banked about the fountain she saw it shining on his shapely grey head as he bent over a copy of the *Antonine Itinerary* and patiently worked out a new theory of its distances. Her own face rested in deep shadow, and she felt grateful for it as she leaned back thinking her own thoughts. It was a whole week now since Charles had visited Bayfield, but she had encountered him that morning in Axcester High Street as she passed up it on horseback with her brothers. Narcissus had reined up to put some question or other about

the drawings, but Endymion (who did not share his brother's liking for M. Raoul) had ridden on, and she had ridden on too, though reluctantly. She recalled his salute, his glance at her, and down-dropped eyes ; she wondered what point Narcissus and he had discussed, and blamed herself for not having found courage to ask. . . .

The stable clock struck ten. She arose and kissed her brothers good-night. By Narcissus she paused.

" Be careful of your eyes, dear. And if you are going to be busy with that great book these next few evenings I will have the table brought across to the other side where you will be cosier."

Narcissus came out of his calculations and looked up at her gently. " Please do not disarrange the furniture for me ; a change always fidgets me, even before I take in precisely what has happened." He smiled. " In that I resemble my old friend Vespasian, who would have no alterations made when he visited his home—*manente villa qualis fuerat olim, ne quid scilicet oculorum consuetudini deperiret.* A pleasant trait, I have always thought."

He lit her candle and kissed her, and Dorothea went up the broad staircase to her own room. Half-way along the corridor she stayed a moment to look down upon the hall. Endymion had dropped his newspaper and was yawning ; a sure sign that

Narcissus, already reabsorbed in the *Itinerary*, would in a few moments be hurried from it to bed.

She reached the door of her room and opened it, then checked an exclamation of annoyance. For some mysterious reason Polly had forgotten to light her candle. This was her rule, never broken before.

She stepped to the bellpull. Her hand was on it, when she heard the girl's voice muttering in the next room—the boudoir. At least, it sounded like Polly's voice though its tone was strangely subdued and level. "Talking to herself," Dorothea decided, and smiled, in spite of her annoyance, as everyone smiles who catches another in this trick. She dropped the bellpull and opened the boudoir door.

Polly was not talking to herself. She was leaning far out of the open window, and at the sound of the door started back into the room with a gasp and a short cry.

"To whom were you talking?"

Dorothea had set the candle down in the bedroom. Outside the window the park lay spread to the soft moonshine, but the moon did not look directly into the boudoir. In the half-light mistress and maid sought each other's eyes.

"To whom were you talking?" Dorothea demanded, sternly.

Polly was silent for a second or two, then her chin went up defiantly.

"To Mr. Raoul," she muttered.

"To M. Raoul!—to M. Raoul? I don't understand. Is M. Raoul— Oh, for goodness' sake speak, girl! What is *that?* I see a piece of paper in your hand."

Polly twisted it in her fingers and made a movement to hide it in her pocket; but with the movement she seemed to reflect.

"He gave it to me; I don't understand anything about it. I was shutting the window, when he whistled to me; he gave me this. I—I think he meant it for you."

Polly's tone suddenly became saucy, but her voice shook.

Dorothea was shaking too, as her fingers closed on the note. She vainly sought to read the girl's eyes. Her own cheeks were burning; she felt the blood rushing into them and singing in her ears. Yet in her abasement she kept her dignity, and, motioning Polly to follow, stepped into the bedroom, unfolded the letter slowly, and read it by the candle there.

"*My Angel,*

"*I have hungered now for a week. Be at your window this evening and let me, at least, be fed with a word. See what I risk for you.*

"*Yours devotedly and for ever.*"

There was no signature, but well enough Dorothea knew the handwriting. A wave of anger swelled in her heart—the first she had ever felt towards him. He had behaved selfishly. "See what I risk for you!"—but to what risk was he exposing *her!* He was breaking their covenant too; demanding that which he must know her conscience abhorred. She had not believed he could understand her so poorly, held her so cheap. Cheap indeed, since he had risked her secret in Polly's hand!

She turned the paper over, noting its creases. Suddenly—"You have opened and read this!" she said.

Polly admitted it with downcast eyes. The girl, after the first surprise, had demeaned herself admirably, and now stood in the attitude proper to a confidential servant; solicitous, respectful, prepared to blink the peccadillo, even to sympathise discreetly at a hint given.

"I'm sorry, Miss, that I opened it; I ought to have told you, but you took me by surprise. You know, Miss, that you gave me leave to run down to my aunt's this evening; and on my way back—just as I was letting myself in by the nursery gate, Mr. Raoul comes tearing up the hill after me and slips this into my hand. To tell you the truth, it rather frightened me—being run after like that. And he said something and ran back—for nine was

just striking, and in a moment the Ting-tang would be ringing and he must be back to answer his name. So in my fluster I didn't catch what he meant. When I got home and opened it, I saw my mistake. But you were downstairs at dinner—I couldn't get to speak with you alone—I waited to tell you ; and just now, when I was drawing the blinds, I heard a whistle——"

"M. Raoul had no right to send me such a message, Polly. I cannot think what he means by it. Nothing that I have ever said to him——"

"No, Miss," Polly assented readily. After a pause she added : "I suppose you'd like me to go now ? You won't be wanting your hair done to-night ? "

"Certainly I wish you to stay. Is he—is M. Raoul outside ? "

"I think so, Miss. Oh, yes—for certain he is."

"Then I must insist on your staying with me while I dismiss him."

"Very good, Miss. Would you wish me to stay here, or to come with you ? "

Dorothea felt herself blushing, and her temper rose again. "For the moment, stay here. I will leave the door open and call you when you are wanted."

She passed into the boudoir and bent to the open window. At this corner the foundations of the house stood some feet lower than the slope out of which they had been levelled, and she looked down

upon a glacis of smooth turf, capped by a glimmering parapet of Bath stone. Beyond stretched the moonlit park.

"M. Raoul!" she called, but scarcely above a whisper.

A figure crept out from the dark angle below and climbed to the parapet.

"Dorothea! Forgive me! Another night and no word with you—I could not bear it."

"You are mad. You are breaking your *parole* and risking shame for me. Nay, you have shamed me already. Polly is here."

"Polly is a good girl; she understands. A word, then, if you must drive me away?"

"Your *parole!*"

"I can pass the sentries. No fear of the patrol hereabouts. Your hand—let down your hand to me. I can reach it from the parapet here—with my fingers only, not with my lips, though even that you never forbade!"

Weakly, she lowered her arm over the sill. He reached to touch it, and she leaned her face towards his—hers in shadow, his pale in the moonlight.

Before their fingers met, a yellow flame leapt from the angle to the left; a loud report banged in her ears and echoed across the park; and Raoul, after swaying a second, pitched forward with a sharp cry and rolled to the foot of the glacis.

Dorothea forced herself back in the room, and stood there upright and shook, with Polly beside her holding her two hands.

"They have shot him!"

The two women listened for a moment. All was still now. Polly stepped to the window and closed it softly.

"But why? What are you doing?" Dorothea asked, in a hoarse whisper.

"They will find quite enough without that," said the practical girl, but her voice quavered.

"Yet if they had seen— Ah, how selfish to think of that now! Hush—that was a groan! He is alive still."

She moved towards the window, but Polly dragged her back by main force.

"Listen, Miss!"

Below they heard the sudden unbarring of doors, and Endymion's voice calling for Mudge, the butler. A bell pealed in the servants' hall, stopped, and began ringing again in short and violent jerks.

"Let me go," commanded Dorothea. "They will never find him, under the slope there. He may be bleeding to death. I must tell——"

But Polly clung to her. "They'll find him safe enough, Miss Dorothea. There's Sam, now—hark! —at the backdoor bell: he'll tell them."

"Sam!"

"Sam Zeally, Miss."

"But I don't understand," Dorothea stammered; with a sharp suspicion of treachery, she pushed the girl from her. "Was Zeally mounting guard to-night? If I thought—don't tell me it was a *trap!* Oh, you wicked girl!"

"No; it wasn't," answered Polly, sulkily. "I don't know nothing of Sam's movements. But he might be hanging about the house; and if he saw a man talking to me, he's just as jealous as fire."

She broke off at the sound of voices below the window. The ray of a lantern, as the search-party jolted it, flashed and danced on wall and ceiling of the dim boudoir. A sharp exclamation announced that Raoul was discovered. A confused muttering followed; and then Dorothea heard Endymion's voice calling up to Mudge from the bottom of the trench.

"Run to Miss Westcote's room and tell her we shall require lint and bandages. There is no cause for alarm, assure her; say there has been an accident—a Frenchman overtaken out of bounds and wounded—I think, not seriously. If she be gone to bed, get the medicine chest and the key and bring them into the kitchen."

Dorothea had charge of the Bayfield medicine chest, and kept it in a cupboard of the boudoir. She groped for it, pulled open drawer after drawer,

rifled them for lint and linen, and by the time Mudge tapped on the door, stood ready with the chest under one arm and a heap of bandages in the other.

"In the kitchen, Mr. Endymion said. I am coming at once; take the chest, run, and have as many candles lit as possible."

Mudge ran; Dorothea followed—with Polly behind her, trembling like a leaf.

The two women reached the kitchen as the party entered with Raoul, and supported him to a chair beside the dying fire. His face was colourless, and he lay back and closed his eyes weakly as Endymion stooped to examine the wounded leg, with Narcissus in close attendance, and the others standing respectfully apart—Mudge, the two footmen (in their shirt sleeves), an under-gardener named Best, one of the housemaids, and Corporal Zeally by the door in regimentals, with his japanned shako askew and his Brown Bess still in his hand. Behind his shoulder, three or four of the women servants hung about the doorway and peered in, between curiosity and terror.

It was a part of Endymion's fastidiousness that the sight of blood—that is, of human blood—turned his stomach. In her distress Dorothea could not help admiring how he conquered this aversion; how he knelt in his spick-and-span evening dress, and, after turning back his ruffles, unlaced the prisoner's soaked shoe and rolled down the stocking.

He looked up gratefully as she entered. In such emergencies Narcissus was worse than useless; but Dorothea had the nursing instinct, and her brothers recognised it. The sight of a wound or a hurt steadied her wits, and she became practical and helpful at once.

"A flesh wound only, I think; just above the ankle—the tendon cut, but the bone apparently not broken."

"It may be splintered, though," said Dorothea. "Has anyone thought of sending for Doctor Ibbetson? He must be fetched at once. A towel, please—three or four—from the dresser there." A footman brought the towels. She knelt, folded two on her lap, and, resting Raoul's foot there, drew the stocking gently from the wound. "A basin and warm water, not too hot. Polly, you will find a small sponge in the second drawer . . ." She nodded towards the medicine chest. "One of you, make up a better fire and set on a fresh kettle . . ."

She gave her orders in a low firm voice, and continued to direct everyone thus, while she sponged the wound and drew off the stocking. Neither towards them nor towards Raoul did she lift her eyes. The bare foot of her beloved rested in her lap. She heard him groan twice, but with no pain inflicted by her fingers; if their slightest pressure had hurt him she would have known. She went on

bathing the wound—she, who could have bathed it with her tears. As time passed, and still the doctor did not come, she began to bandage it. She called on Polly for the bandages; then, still without looking up, she divined that Polly was useless—was engaged in trying to catch Zeally's eye, and warn him or get a word with him.

"He's pale as a ghost yet," said Endymion. "Another dose of brandy might set him up. I gave him some from my flask before bringing him in."

"He is not going to faint," she answered.

"Well, I won't bother him with questions until he comes round a bit. You, Zeally, had better step into my room though, and give me your version of the affair."

But as the Corporal saluted and took a step forward, the prisoner opened his eyes.

"Before you examine Zeally, sir, let me save you what trouble I can." He spoke faintly, but with deliberation. "I wish to deny nothing. I was escaping, and he tracked me. He came on me as I cut across the park, and challenged. I did not answer, but ran around a corner of the house and jumped the parapet thinking to double along the trench there and put him off the scent—at least to dodge the bullet, if he fired. But as I jumped for it, he winged me. A very pretty shot, too. With your leave, sir, I'd like to shake hands with him on

it. Shake hands, Corporal!" Raoul stretched out a hand sideways. "You're a smart fellow, and no malice between soldiers."

Dorothea heard Polly's gasp: it seemed to her that all the room must hear it. Her own hand trembled on the bandage. She had forgotten her danger—the all but inevitable scandal—until Raoul brought it back to her, and in the same breath saved her by his heroic lie. She could not profit by it, though. Her lips parted to refute it, and for the first time she gazed up at him, her eyes brimming with sudden love, gratitude, pride, even while they entreated against the sacrifice. He was smiling down with an air of faint amusement; yet beneath the lashes she read a command which mastered her will, imposed silence. He had taken on a new manliness, and for the first time in the story of their loves she felt herself dominated by something stronger than passion. He had swept her off her feet, before now, by boyish ardour: her humility, the marvel of being loved, had aided him; but hitherto in her heart she had always felt her own character to be the stronger. Now he challenged her on woman's own ground—that of self-abnegation; he commanded her to his own hurt, he towered above her. She had never dreamed of a love like this. Beaten, despairing for him, yet proud as she had never been in her life, she held her breath.

Corporal Zeally was merely bewildered. His was a deliberate mind and had hatched out the night's catastrophe after incubating it for weeks. Unconvinced by Polly's explanation of her meeting with M. Raoul at the Nursery gate, he had nursed a dull jealousy and set himself to watch, and had dogged his man down at length with the slow cunning of a yokel bred of a line of poachers. Raoul's tribute to his smartness perplexed him; and almost he scented a trap.

"Beg your pardon, Squire," he began heavily, forgetting military forms of address, "but the gentleman don't put it right."

"Oh, hang your British modesty!" put in Raoul with a wry laugh. "If it pleases you to represent that the whole thing was accidental and you don't deserve to be promoted sergeant for to-night's work, at least you might respect my vanity!"

Polly saw her opportunity. She crossed boldly and made as if to lay over the Corporal's mouth the hand that would fain have boxed his ears. "Reckon this is my affair," she announced, with an effrontery at which one of the footmen guffawed openly. "Be modest, as you please, my lad, when I've married 'ee; but I won't put up with modesty from anyone under a sergeant, and that I warn 'ee!"

The Corporal eyed his sweetheart without forgiveness. His mouth was open, but upon the word

"sergeant," he shut it again and began to digest the idea.

"You know, of course, sir," Endymion Westcote addressed the prisoner coldly, "to what such a confession commits you? I do not see what other construction the facts admit, but it is so serious in itself and in its consequences that I warn you——"

"I have broken my *parole*, sir," said Raoul, simply. "Of the temptations you cannot judge. Of the shame I am as profoundly sensible as you can be. The consequences I am ready to suffer."

He sank back in his chair as Dr. Ibbetson entered.

An hour later Dorothea said good-night to her brother in the great hall. He had lit his candle and was mixing himself a glass of brandy and water.

"The sight of blood—" he excused himself. "I am sorry for the fellow, though I never liked him. I suppose, now, there was nothing between him and that girl Polly? For a moment—from Zeally's manner—" He gulped down the drink. "His confession was honest enough, anyhow. Poor fool! he's safe in hospital for a week, and his friends, if he has any, and they know what it means, will pray for that week to be prolonged."

"What does it mean?" Dorothea managed to ask.

"It means Dartmoor."

Dorothea's candlestick shook in her hand, and the extinguisher fell on the floor. Her brother picked it up and restored it.

"Naturally," he murmured with brotherly concern, "your nerves! It has been a trying night, but you comported yourself admirably, Dorothea. Ibbetson assures me he could not have tied the bandage better himself. I felt proud of my sister." He kissed her gallantly and pulled out his watch. "Past twelve o'clock!—time they were round with the barouche. The sooner we get Master Raoul down to the Infirmary and pack him in bed, the better."

As Dorothea went up the stairs she heard the sound of wheels on the gravel.

She could not accept his sacrifice. No; a way must be found to save him, and in her prayers that night she began to seek it. But while she prayed, her heart was bowed over a great joy. She had a hero for a lover!

CHAPTER IX.

DOROTHEA CONFESSES.

SHE saw no more of him, and heard very little, before the Court Martial met. No one acquainted with the code of that age—so strait-laced in its proprieties, so full-blooded in its vices—will need to be told that she never dreamed of asking her brother's permission to visit the Prisoners' Infirmary. He reported—once a day, perhaps, and casually—that the patient was doing well. Dorothea ventured once to sound General Rochambeau, but the old aristocrat answered stiffly that he took no interest in *déclassés*, and plainly hinted that, in his judgment, M. Raoul had sinned past pardon ; which but added to her remorse. From time to time she obtained some hearsay news through Polly ; but Polly's chief interest now lay in her approaching marriage.

For the Commissary, while accepting Raoul's version of his capture, had an intuitive gift which saved him from wholly believing in it. Indeed, his conduct of the affair, if we consider the extent of his knowledge, was nothing less than masterly. Cor-

poral Zeally found himself a sergeant within forty-eight hours, and within an hour of the announcement he and Polly were given an audience in the Bayfield library, with the result that Parson Milliton cried their banns in Axcester Church on the following Sunday, and the bride elect received a month's wages and three weeks' notice of dismissal, with a hint that the reason for her short retention—to instruct her successor in Miss Dorothea's ways—was ostensible rather than real. With Raoul's fate he declined to meddle. "Here," he said in effect, "is my report, including the prisoner's confession. I do my simple duty in presenting it. But the young man was captured in my grounds; he was known to be a *protégé* of my brother's. Finding him wounded and faint with loss of blood, we naturally did our best for him, and this again renders me perhaps too sympathetic. The law is the law, however, and must take its course." No attitude could have been more proper or have shown better feeling.

So Raoul, who made a rapid recovery—barring the limp which he carried to the end of his days—was tried, condemned, and sentenced in the space of two hours. He stuck to his story, and the court had no alternative. Dartmoor or Stapleton inevitably awaited the prisoner who broke *parole* and was retaken. The night after his sentence Raoul was marched past the Bayfield gates under

escort for Dartmoor. And Dorothea had not intervened.

This, of course, proves that she was of no heroical fibre. She knew it. Night after night she had lain awake, vainly contriving plans for his deliverance; and either she lacked inventiveness or was too honest, for no method could she discover which avoided confession of the simple truth. As the days passed without catastrophe and without news save that her lover was bettering in hospital, she staved off the truth, trusting that the next night would bring inspiration. Almost she hoped—being quite unwise in such matters—that his sufferings would be accepted as cancelling his offence. So she played the coward. The blow fell on the evening when Endymion announced, in casual tones, that the Court Martial was fixed for the day after next.

That night, indeed, brought something like an inspiration; and on the morrow she rode into Axcester and called upon Polly, now a bride of six days' standing and domiciled in one of the Westcote cottages in Church Street, a little beyond the bridge. For a call of state this was somewhat premature, but it might pass.

Polly appeared to think it premature. Her furniture was topsy-turvy, and her hair in curl-papers; she obviously did not expect visitors, and resented this curtailment of the honeymoon. She showed it

even when Dorothea, after apologies, came straight to the point :

" Polly, I am very unhappy."

" Indeed, Miss ? "

" You know that I must be, since M. Raoul is going to that horrible war-prison rather than let the truth be known."

" But since you didn't encourage him, Miss——"

" Of course I didn't encourage him to come," said Dorothea, quickly.

" Why then it was his own fault, and he broke his word by breaking bounds."

" Yes, strictly his *parole* was broken ; but the meaning of *parole* is, that a prisoner promises to make no attempt to escape. M. Raoul never dreamed of escaping, yet that is the ground of his punishment."

" Well," said Polly, " if he chooses to say he was escaping, I don't see how we—I mean, how you—can help."

" Why, by telling the truth ; and that's what we ought to do, though it was wrong of him to expose us to it."

" To be sure it was," Polly assented.

" But," urged Dorothea, " couldn't we tell the truth of what happened without anyone's wanting to know more ? He gave you a note, which you took without guessing what it contained. He wished to

have speech with me. Before you could give me the note and I could refuse to see him—as I should certainly have done—he had arrived. His folly deserves punishment, but no such punishment as being sent to Dartmoor."

Polly eyed her ex-mistress shrewdly.

"Have you burnt the note?" she asked.

Dorothea, blushing to the roots of her hair, stammered:

"No; I kept it—it was evidence for him, you see. I wish, now——"

She broke off as Polly nodded her head.

"I guessed you'd have kept it. And now you'll never make up your mind to burn it. You're too honest."

"But, surely the note itself would not be called for?"

"I don't know. Folks ask curious questions in courts of law, I've always heard. Beggin' your pardon, Miss, but your face tells too many tales, and any one but a fool would ask for that note before he'd been dealing with you three minutes. If he didn't, he'd ask you what was in it. And then you'd be forced to tell lies—which you couldn't, to save your soul!"

Dorothea knew this to be true. She reflected a moment. "I should decline to show it, or to answer."

Mrs. Zeally thought it about time to assert herself. "Very good, Miss. And now, how about *me?* They'd ask me questions, too; and I'd have you consider, Miss Dorothea, that though not shaken down to it yet—not, as you might say, in a state to expect callers or make them properly welcome—I'm a respectable married woman. I don't mind confessing to you, Zeally isn't a comfortable man. He's pleased enough to be sergeant, though he don't quite know how it came about; and he's that sullen with brooding over it, that for sixpence he'd give me the strap to ease his feelings. I ain't complaining. Mr. Endymion chose to take me on the hop and hurry up the banns, and I'm going to accommodate myself to the man. He's three-parts of a fool, and you needn't fear but I'll manage him. But I ain't for taking no risks, and that I tell you fair."

Dorothea was stunned. "You don't mean to say that Zeally suspects *you?*"

"Why, of course he does!" said Polly. Prudence urged her to repeat that Zeally was three-parts of a fool; but, being nettled, she spoke the words uppermost: "Who d'ee think he'd suspect?"

Dorothea, however, was too desperately dejected to feel the prick of this shaft. "You will not help me, then?" was all her reply to it.

"Why, no, Miss! if you put it in that point-

blank way. A married woman's got to think of her reputation first of all."

Polly's attitude might be selfish, unfeeling; but the fundamental incapacity for gratitude in girls of Polly's class will probably surprise and pain their mistresses until the end of the world. After all, Polly was right. An attempt to clear Raoul by telling the superficial truth must involve terrible risks, and might at any turn enforce a choice between full confession and falsehood.

Dorothea could not bring herself to lie, even heroically; and there would be no heroism in lying to save herself. On the other hand, the thought of a forced confession—it might be before a tribunal —was too hideous. No, the suggestion had been a mad one, and Polly had rightly thrown cold water on it. Also, it had demanded too much of Polly, who could not be expected to jeopardise her matrimonial prospects to right a wrong for which she was not in truth responsible.

Dorothea loved a hero, but knew she was no heroine. She called herself a pitiful coward—unjustly, because, nurtured as she had been on the proprieties, surrounded all her days by men and women of a class most sensitive to public opinion, who feared the breath of scandal worse than a plague, confession for her must mean a shame unspeakable. What! Admit that she, Dorothea Westcote, had loved a French

prisoner almost young enough to be her son! that she had given him audience at night! that he had been shot and captured beneath her window!

Unjustly, too, she accused herself, because it is the decision, not the terror felt in deciding, which distinguishes the brave from the cowardly. If you doubt the event with Dorothea, the fault must be mine. She was timid, but she came of a race which will endure anything rather than the conscious anguish of doing wrong.

Nor, had her conscience needed them, did it lack reminders. Narcissus had been persuaded to send the drawings to London to be treated by lithography, a process of which he knew nothing, but to which M. Raoul, during his studies in Paris, had given much attention, and apparently not without making some discoveries—unimportant perhaps, and such as might easily reward an experimenter in an art not well past its infancy. At anyrate, he had drawn up elaborate instructions for the London firm of printers, and when the proofs arrived with about a third of these instructions neglected and another third misunderstood, Narcissus was at his wits' end—aghast at the poorness of the impressions, yet not knowing in the least how to correct them.

He gave Dorothea no peace with them. Evening after evening she was invited to pore upon the drawings over which she and her lover had bent together;

to criticise here and offer a suggestion there ; while every line revived a memory, inflicted a pang. What suggestion could she find save the one which must not be spoken ?—to send, fetch the artist back from Dartmoor, and remedy all this, with so much beside !

" But," urged Narcissus, " you and he spent hours together. I quite understood that he had explained the process to you, and on the strength of this I gave it too little attention. Of course, if one could have foreseen—" He broke off, and added with some testiness : " I'd give fifty pounds to have the fellow back, if only for ten minutes' talk."

" But why couldn't we ? " Dorothea asked suddenly, breathlessly.

They were alone by the table under the bookcase. On the far side of the hall, before the fire, Endymion dozed after a long day with the partridges. Narcissus' words awoke a wild hope.

" But why couldn't we ? " she repeated, her voice scarcely louder than a whisper.

" Well, that's an idea ! " he chuckled.

Confound the fellow he imposed on all of us ! If we had only guessed what he intended, we might have signed a petition telling him how necessary he had made himself, and imploring him, for our sakes, to behave like a gentleman."

" But supposing—supposing he was innocent—that he had never meant—" She put out a hand to

lay it on her brother's. "Hush!" she could have cried; but it was too late.

"Endymion!" Narcissus called across the room, jocosely.

"Eh! What is it?" Endymion came out of his doze.

"We're in a mess with these drawings, a complete mess; and we want Master Raoul fetched out of Dartmoor to set us right. Come now—as Commissary, what'll you take to work it for us? Fifty pounds has already been offered."

Dorothea turned from the table with a sigh for her lost chance.

"He'd like it," answered Endymion, grimly. "But, my dear fellow,"—he slewed himself in his chair for a look around the hall,—"pray moderate your tones. I particularly deprecate levity on such matters within possible hearing of the servants; that class of person never understands a joke."

Narcissus rubbed the top of his head—a trick of his in perplexity.

"But, seriously: it has only this moment occurred to me. Couldn't the drawings be conveyed to him, in due form, through the Commandant of the Prison? The poor fellow owes *us* no grudge. I believe he would be eager to do us this small service. And, really, they have made such a mess of the stones——"

"Impossible! Out of the question! And I may say now, and once for all, that the mention of that unhappy youth is repugnant to me. By good fortune, we escaped being compromised by him; and I have refrained from reminding you that your patronage of him was, to say the least, indiscreet."

"God bless me! You don't suggest, I hope, that I encouraged him to escape!"

"I suggest nothing. But I am honestly glad to be quit of him, and take some satisfaction in remembering that I detested the fellow from the first. He had too much cleverness with his bad style, or, if you prefer it, was sufficiently like a gentleman to be dangerous. Pah! For his particular offence, I would have had the old hulks maintained in the Hamoaze, with all their severities; as it is, the posturer may find Dartmoor pretty stiff, but will yet have the consolation of herding with his betters."

Strangely enough this speech did more to fix Dorothea's resolve than all she had read or heard of the rigours of the war-prison. Gently reared though she was, physical suffering seemed to her less intolerable than to be unjustly held in this extreme of scorn. This was the deeper wrong; and putting herself in her lover's place, feeling with his feelings, she knew it to be by far the deeper. In Dartmoor he shared the sufferings of men unfor-

tunate but not despicable, punished for fighting in their country's cause. But here was a moral punishment, deserved by none but the vilest; and she had helped to bring it—was allowing it to rest—upon a hero!

In the long watches of that night it never occurred to her that the brutality of her brother's contempt was overdone. And Endymion, not given to self-questioning at any time, was probably unconscious of a dull wrath revenging itself for many pin-pricks of Master Raoul's clever tongue. Endymion Westcote, like many pompous men, usually hurt somebody when he indulged in a joke, and for this cause, perhaps, had a nervous dislike of wit in others. Dull in taking a jest, but almost preternaturally clever in suspecting one, he had disliked Raoul's sallies in proportion as they puzzled him. The remembrance of them rankled, and this had been his bull-roar of revenge.

He spent the next morning in his office; and returning at three in the afternoon, retired to the library to draw up the usual monthly report required of him as Commissary. He had been writing for an hour or more, when Dorothea tapped at the door and entered.

Endymion did not observe her pallor; indeed, he scarcely looked up.

"Ah! You have come for a book? Make as

little noise, then, as possible, that's a good soul. You interrupted me in a column of figures."

He began to add them up afresh, tapping the table with the fingers of his left hand, as his custom was when counting. Dorothea waited. The addition made—he entered it, resting three shapely finger-tips on the table's edge for the number to be carried over.

"I wish to speak with you particularly."

He laid down his pen resignedly. Her voice was urgent, and he knew well enough that the occasion must be urgent when Dorothea interrupted his work.

"Anything wrong?"

"It—it's about M. Raoul."

His eyebrows went up, but only to contract again upon a magisterial frown.

"Really, after the request I was obliged to make to Narcissus last night—you were present, I believe? Is it possible that I failed to make plain my distaste?"

"Ah, but listen! It is no question of distaste, but of a great wrong. He was not trying to escape; he told you an untruth, to—to save——"

Endymion had picked up a paper-knife, and leaned back, tapping his teeth with it.

"Do you know?" he said, "I suspected something of this kind from the first, though I had no

idea you shared the knowledge. Zeally's cleverness struck me as a trifle too—ah—phenomenal for belief. I scented some low intrigue; and Polly's dismissal may indicate my pretty shrewd guess at the culprit."

"But it was not Polly!"

"Eh?"

Endymion sat bolt upright.

"You must not blame Polly. It was I whom M. Raoul came to see that night."

He stared at her, incredulous.

"My dear Dorothea, are you quite insane?"

"He wished to see me—to speak with me; he gave the girl a note for me. I knew nothing about it until I went upstairs that night, and found her at the boudoir window. M. Raoul was outside. He had arrived before she could deliver the message."

"Quite so!" with a nasally derisive laugh. "And you really need me to point out how prettily those turtles were befooling you?"

"Indeed, no; it was not that."

He struck the table impatiently with the paper-knife.

"My dear woman, *do* exert some common sense! What in the name of wonder could the fellow have to discuss with *you* at that hour? Your pardon if, finding no apparent limits to your innocence, I

assume it to be illimitable, and point out that he would scarcely break bounds and play Romeo beneath the window of a middle-aged lady for the purpose of discussing water-colours with her, or the exploits of Vespasian."

The taunt brought red to Dorothea's cheeks, and stung her into courage.

"He came to see me," she persisted. Her voice dropped a little. "I had come to feel a regard for M. Raoul; and he—" She could not go on. Her eyes met her brother's for a moment, then fell before them.

What she expected she could not tell. Certainly she did not expect what happened, and his sudden laughter smote her like a whip. It broke in a shout of high, uncontrollable mirth, and he leaned back and shook in his chair until the tears streamed down his cheeks.

"You!" he gasped. "*You!* Oh, oh, oh!"

She stood beneath the scourge, silent. She felt it curl across and bite the very flesh, and thought it was killing her. Her bosom heaved.

It ceased. He sat upright again, wiping his eyes.

"But it's incredible!" he protested; "the scoundrel has fooled you all along. Yes, of course," he pondered; "that explains the success of the trick, which otherwise was clumsy beyond belief; in face, its clumsiness puzzled me. But how *was*

I to guess ? " He pulled himself up on the edge of another guffaw. " Look here, Dorothea, be sensible. It's clear as daylight the fellow was after Polly, and made you his cats-paw. Face it, my dear ; face it, and conquer your illusions. I understand it must cost you some suffering ; but, after all, you must find some blame in yourself—in your heart, I mean, not in your conduct. Doubtless your conduct showed weakness, or he would never have dared—but there, I can trust my sister. Face it ; the thing's absurd ! You, a woman of thirty-eight (or is it thirty-nine ?), and he, if I may judge from appearances, young enough to be your son ! Polly was his game—the deceitful little slut ! You must see it for yourself. And after all, it's more natural. Immoral, I've no doubt——"

He paused in the middle of his harangue. A parliamentary candidate (unsuccessful) for Axcester had once dared to poke fun at Endymion Westcote for having asserted, in a public speech, that indecency was worse than immorality. For the life of him Endymion could never see where the joke came in ; but the fellow had illustrated it with such a wealth of humorous instances, and had kept his ignorant audience for twenty minutes in such fits of laughter, that he never afterwards approached the antithesis but he skirted it with a red face.

And Dorothea ?

The scourge might cut into her heart; it could not reach the image of Raoul she shielded there. She knew her lover too well, and that he was incapable of this baseness. But the injurious charge, diverted from him, fell upon her own defences, and, breaking them, let in the cruel light at length on her passion, her folly. This was how the world would see it. . . . Yes! Raoul was right—there is no enemy comparable with Time. Looks, fortune, birth, breed, unequal hearts and minds—all these Love may confound and play with; but Time, which divides the dead from the living, sets easily between youth and age a gulf which not only forbids love but derides:

> Age, I do abhor thee;
> Youth, I do adore thee;
> O, my Love, my Love is young!

She could give counsel, sympathy, care; could delight in his delights, hope in his hopes, melt with his woes, and, having wept a little, find comfort for them. She could thrill at his footsteps, blush at his salutation, sit happily beside him and talk or be silent, reading his moods. He might fill her waking day, haunt her dreams, in the end pass into prison for her sake, having crowned love with martyrdom. And the world would laugh as Endymion had laughed! Her hands went up to shut out the roar

of it. A coarse amour with Polly—that could be understood. Polly was young. Polly . . .

"What will you do?" she heard herself asking, and could scarcely believe the voice belonged to her.

"Do? Why, if my theory be right—and I hope I've convinced you—I see no use in meddling. The girl is respectably married. It will cause her quite unnecessary trouble if we rip this affair open again. Her husband will have just ground for complaint, and it might—I need not point out—be a little awkward, eh?"

For the first time in her life Dorothea regarded her brother with something like contempt. But the flash gave way to a look of weary resolve.

"Then I must tell the truth—to others," she said.

It confounded him for a moment. But although here was a new Dorothea, belying all experience, his instinct for handling men and women told him at once what had happened. He had driven her too far. He was even clever enough to foresee that winning her back to obedience would be a ticklish, almost a desperate, business; and even sensitive enough to redden at his blunder.

"You do not agree with my view?" he asked, tapping the table slowly.

"I disbelieve it. I have no right to believe it,

even if I had the power. He is in prison. You must help me to set him free. If not——"

"He cannot possibly return to Axcester."

"Oh, what is that to me?" she cried with sudden impatience. Then her tone fell back to its dull level. "I have not been pleading for myself."

"No, no: I understand." His brow cleared, as a man's who faces a bad business and resolves to go through with it. "Well, there is only one way to spare you and everyone. We must get him a cartel."

"A cartel?"

"Yes—get him exchanged, and sent home to his friends. The War Office owes me something, and will no doubt oblige me in a small affair like this without asking questions. Oh, certainly it can be managed. I will write at once."

CHAPTER X.

DARTMOOR.

DOROTHEA had the profoundest faith in her brother's ability. That he hit at once on this simple solution which had eluded her through many wakeful nights did not surprise her in the least. Nor did she doubt for a moment that he would manage it as he promised.

But she could not thank him. He had beaten her spirit sorely—so sorely, that for days her whole body ached with the bruise. She did not accuse him: her one flash of contempt had lasted for an instant only, and the old habit of reverence quickly effaced it. But he had exposed her weakness; had forced her to see it, naked and pitiful, with no chivalry—either manly or brotherly—covering it; and seeing it with nothing to depend upon, she learned for the first time in her life the high, stern lesson of independence.

She learned it unconsciously, but she never forgot it. And it is to Endymion's credit that he recognised the great alteration and allowed for it.

He had driven her too far. She would never again be the same Dorothea. And never again by word or look did he remind her of that hour of abasement.

An exchange of prisoners was not to be managed in a day, and would take weeks, perhaps six weeks or a couple of months. He discussed this with her, quietly, as a matter of business entrusted to him; explained what steps he had taken, what letters he had written; when he expected definite news from the War Office. She met him on the same ground. "Yes, he could not have done better." She trusted him absolutely.

And in fact he had been better than his word. Ultimate success, to be sure, was certain. It were strange if Mr. Westcote, who had opened his purse to support a troop of Yeomanry, who held two parliamentary seats at the Government's service and two members at call to bully the War Office whenever he desired, who might at any time have had a baronetcy for the asking—it were strange indeed if Mr. Westcote could not obtain so trivial a favour as the exchange of a prisoner. He could do this, but he could not appreciably hurry the correspondence by which Pall Mall bargained a Frenchman in the forest of Dartmoor against an Englishman in the fortress of Briançon in the Hautes Alpes. Foreseeing delays, he had written privately to the Commandant at Dartmoor—a Major Sotheby, with

whom he had some slight acquaintance—advising him of his efforts and requesting him to show the prisoner meanwhile all possible indulgence. The letter contained a draft for ten pounds, to be spent upon small comforts at the Commandant's discretion; but M. Raoul was not to be informed of the donor, or of his approaching liberty.

In theory—such was the routine—Raoul remained one of the Axcester contingent of prisoners, and all reports concerning him must pass through the Commissary's hands. In the last week of October, when brother and sister daily expected the cartel, arrived a report that the prisoner was in hospital with a sharp attack of pleurisy. Major Sotheby added a private note :—

" I feared yesterday that the exchange would come too late for him ; but to-day the Medical Officer, who has just left me, speaks hopefully. I have no doubt, however, that a winter in this climate would be fatal. The fellow's lungs are breaking down, and even if they could stand the fogs, the cold must finish him."

Dorothea stood by a window in the library when Endymion read this out to her ; the very window through which she had been gazing that spring morning when Raoul first kissed her. To-day the first of the winter's snow fell gently, persistently, out of a leaden and windless sky.

She turned. "I must go to him," she said.

"But to what purpose——"

"Oh, you may trust me!"

"My dear girl, that was not in my mind." He spoke gently. "But until the warrant arrives——"

"We will give it until to-morrow; by every account it should reach us to-morrow. You shall take it with me. I must see him once more; only once—in your presence, if you wish."

Next morning they rode into the town together, an hour before the mail's arrival. Endymion alighted at the Town House to write a business letter or two before strolling down to the post office. Dorothea cantered on to the top of the hill, and then walked Mercury to and fro, while she watched the taller rise beyond. The snow had ceased falling; but a crisp north wind skimmed the drifts and powdered her dark habit.

Twice she pulled out her watch; but the coach was up to time in spite of the heavy roads; and as it topped the rise she reined Mercury to the right-about and cantered back to await it. Already the street had begun to fill as usual; and, as usual, there was General Rochambeau picking his way along the pavement to present himself for the Admiral's letter—the letter which never arrived.

Would *her* letter never arrive?

He halted on the kerb by her stirrup. She asked after the Admiral's health.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, if ever he leaves his bed again, it will be a miracle."

She was not listening. Age, age again!—it makes all the difference. Here came the coach—did it hold a letter for Raoul? Raoul was young.

The coach rolled by with less noise than usual, on the carpet of snow churned brown with traffic. As it passed, the guard lifted his horn and blew cheerily. She followed, telling herself it was a good omen. During the long wait outside the post office she rebuked herself more than once for building a hope upon it. Name after name was called, and at each call a prisoner pushed forward to the doorway for his letter. She caught sight of the General on the outskirts of the crowd. Her brother would not come out until every letter had been distributed.

But when he appeared in the doorway she read the good news in his face. He made his way briskly towards her, the prisoners falling back to give passage.

"Right; it has come," he said. "Trot away home and have the valises packed, while I run into 'The Dogs' and order the chaise."

Once clear of the town, she galloped. There was little need to hurry, for her own valise had been packed overnight. Having sent Mudge to attend

to her brother's, she ran to Narcissus' room—his scriptorium, as he called it.

Narcissus was at home to-day, busy with the cellar accounts. He took stock twice a year and composed a report in language worthy of a survey of the Roman Empire. Before he could look up, Dorothea had kissed him on the crown of his venerable head.

"Such news, dear! Endymion has ordered a chaise from 'The Dogs,' and is going to take me to Dartmoor!"

"Dartmoor—God bless my soul!" He rubbed his head, and added with a twinkle: "Why, what have *you* been doing?"

"Endymion has a cartel of exchange for M. Raoul, and we are to carry it."

"Ah, so that is what you two have been conspiring over? I smelt a rat somewhere. But, really, this is delightful of you—delightful of you both. Only, why on earth should you be carrying the release yourselves, in this weather."

"He is very ill," said Dorothea, seriously.

"Indeed? Poor fellow, poor fellow! Still, that scarcely explains——"

"And you will be good, and take your meals regularly when Mudge beats the gong? And you won't sit up late and set fire to the house? But I must run off and tell everyone to take care of you."

She kissed him again, and was half-way down the corridor before he called after her :

" Dorothea, Dorothea ! the drawings ! "

" Ah, to be sure ; I forgot," she murmured, as he thrust the parcel into her hand.

" Forgot ? Forgot the drawings ? But, God bless my soul !——"

He passed his hand over his grey hairs and stared down the corridor after her.

The roads were heavy to start with, and beyond Chard they grew heavier. At Honiton, which our travellers reached at midnight, it was snowing ; and Dorothea, when the sleepy chambermaid aroused her at dawn, looked out upon a forbidding world of white. The postboys were growling, and she half feared that Endymion would abandon the journey for the day. But if he lacked her zeal, he had the true Englishman's hatred of turning back. She, who had known him always for a master of men, learned a new awe of her splendid brother. He took command ; he cross-examined landlord and postboys, pooh-poohed their objections, extracted from them in half-a-dozen curt questions more information than, five minutes before, they were conscious of possessing, to judge from the scratching of heads which produced it ; finally, he handed Dorothea into the chaise, sprang in himself, and closed discussion with a slam of the door. They were

driven off amid the salaams of ostler, boots, waiter, and two chambermaids, among whom he had scattered largess with the lordliest hand.

So the chaise ploughed through Exeter to Moreton Hampstead, where they supped and rested for another night. But before dawn they were off again. Snow lay in thick drifts on the skirts of the great moor, and snow whirled about them as they climbed, until day broke upon a howling desert, across which Dorothea peered but could discern no features. Not leagues but years divided Bayfield from this table-land, high over all the world, uninhabited, without tree or gate or hedge. Her eyes were heavy with lack of sleep, smarting with the bite of the north wind, which neither ceased nor eased until, towards ten o'clock, the carriage began to lumber downhill towards Two Bridges, under the lee of Crockern Tor. Beyond came a heavy piece of collar work, the horses dropping to a walk as they heaved through the drifts towards a depression between two tors closing the view ahead. Dorothea's eyes, avoiding the wind, were fixed on the tor to the left, when Endymion touched her hand and pointed towards the base of the other. There, grey—almost black—against the white hillside, a mass of masonry loomed up through the weather ; the great circle of the War Prison.

The road did not lead them to it direct. They must halt first at the bare village of Prince Town,

and drink coffee and warm themselves at the " Plume of Feathers Inn," before facing the last few hundred yards beneath the lee of North Hessary. But a little before noon, Dorothea—still with a sense of being lifted on a platform miles above the world she knew —alighted before a tremendous archway of piled granite set in a featureless wall, and closed with a sheeted gate of iron. A grey-coated sentry, pacing here in front of his snow-capped box, challenged and demanded their business.

" Visitors for the Commandant ! " The sentry tugged at an iron bellpull, and a bell tolled twice within. Dorothea's feet were half-frozen in spite of her wraps—she stamped them in the snow while she studied the gateway and the enormous blocks which arched it, unhewn save for two words carved in Roman capitals—" PARCERE SUBJECTIS."

A key turned in the wicket. " Visitors for the Commandant ! " They stepped through, and after pausing a moment while the porter shot the lock again behind them, followed him across the yard to the Commandant's quarters.

The outer wall of the great War Prison enclosed a circle of thirty acres ; within it a second wall surrounded an acre in which stood the five rectangular blocks of the prison proper, with two slightly smaller buildings—the one a hospital, the other set apart for the petty officers ; and between the inner and

outer walls ran a *via militaris*, close on a mile in circumference, constantly paraded by the guard, and having raised platforms from which the sentinels could overlook the inner wall and the area. The area was not completely circular, since, where it faced the great gate, a segment had been cut out of it for the Commandant's quarters and outbuildings and the entrance yard across which our travellers now followed their guide.

The Commandant hurried out from his office to welcome them—a bustling little officer with sandy hair and the kindliest possible face; a trifle self-important, obviously proud of his prison, and, after a fashion, of his prisoners too; anxiously, elaborately polite in his manner, especially towards Dorothea.

"Major Westcote!"—he gave Endymion his full title—"My *dear* sir, this is indeed— And Miss Westcote?" he bowed as he was introduced. "Delighted—honoured! But what a journey! You must be famished, positively; you will be wanting luncheon at once—yes, really you must allow me. No? A glass of sherry, then, and a biscuit at least . . ." He ran to the door, called to his orderly to bring some glasses, and came back rubbing his hands. "It's an ill wind, as they say . . ."

"We have come with the order about which we have corresponded."

"For that poor fellow Raoul?" The Command-

ant nodded gaily and smiled; and Dorothea, who had been watching his face, felt the load dissolve and roll off her heart, as a pile of snow slides from a bough in the sunshine. "He is better, I am glad to report—out of bed and fairly convalescent indeed. But I hope my message did not alarm you needlessly. It was touch-and-go with him for twenty-four hours; still, he was bettering when I wrote. And to bring you all this way, and in such weather!"

"My sister and I," explained Endymion, "take a particular interest in his case."

But the voluble officer was not so easily silenced.

"So, to be sure, I gathered." He bowed gallantly to Dorothea. "'O woman! in our hours of ease, Uncertain, coy, and hard to please'—not, of course, that I attribute any such foibles to Miss Westcote, but for the sake of the conclusion."

"Can we see him?"

"Eh? Before luncheon? Oh, most assuredly, if you wish it. He has been transferred to the Convalescents' Ward. We will step across at once." He drew from his pocket a small master-key, attached by a steel chain to his belt, and blew into the wards thoughtfully while he studied the paper handed to him by Endymion. "Quite in order, of course. No doubt, you and Miss Westcote would prefer to break the good news to him in private? Yes, yes; I will have him sent up to the Consulting Room. The

Doctor has finished his morning rounds, and you will be quite alone there."

He picked up his cap and escorted them out and across the court to the gate of the main prison. Beyond this Dorothea found herself in a vast snowy yard, along two sides of which ran covered ways or piazzas open to the air, but faced with iron bars, and behind these bars flitted the forms of the prisoners at exercise, stamping the flagged pavement to keep their starved blood in circulation. At a sight of the Commandant with his two visitors—so small a spectacle had power to divert them—all this movement, this stamping, was hushed suddenly. Voices broke into chatter; faces appeared between the bars and stared.

"Yes," said the Commandant, reading Dorothea's thought, "a large family to be responsible for! How many would you guess, now?"

"A thousand, at least," she murmured.

"*Six* thousand! Each of those blocks yonder will accommodate fifteen hundred men. And then there is the hospital—usually pretty full at this season, I regret to say. Come, I won't detain you; but really in passing you must have a look at one of our dormitories."

He threw open a door, and she gazed in upon an endless avenue of iron pillars slung with double tiers of hammocks. The place seemed clean enough:

at the far end of the vista a fatigue gang of prisoners was busy with pails and brushes; but either it had not been thoroughly ventilated, or the dense numbers packed in it for so many hours a day had given the building an atmosphere of its own, warm and unpleasant, if not precisely fœtid, after the pure, stinging air of the moorland.

"We can sleep seven hundred here," said the Commandant; "and another dormitory of the same size runs overhead. The top story they use as a promenade and for indoor recreation." He pointed to a number of grilles set in the wall at the back, at equal distances. "For air," he explained, "and also for keeping watch on *messieurs*. Yes, we find that necessary. Behind each is a small chamber, hollowed most scientifically, quite a little temple of acoustics. If Miss Westcote, now, would care to step into one and listen, while I stand below with the Major and converse in ordinary tones——"

"No, no," Dorothea declined, hurriedly, and with a shiver.

It hurt her to think of Raoul herded among seven hundred miserables in this endless barrack, his every movement overlooked, his smallest speech overheard, by an eaves-dropping sentry.

"I think," Endymion chimed in, "my sister feels her long journey, and would be glad to get our business over."

"Ah, to be sure—a thousand pardons!"

The Commandant shut the door and piloted them across to the hospital block. Here on the threshold the same warm, acrid atmosphere assailed Dorothea's nostrils, and almost choked her breathing. Their guide led the way up a flight of stone steps to the first floor, and down a whitewashed corridor, lit along one side with narrow barred casements. A little more than half-way down the corridor the blank wall facing these casements was pierced by a low arched passage. Into this burrow the Commandant dived; and, standing outside, they heard a key turned in a lock. He reappeared and beckoned to them.

"From the gallery here," he whispered, "you look right down into the Convalescent Ward."

Through the iron bars of the gallery Dorothea caught a glimpse of a long bare room, with twenty or thirty dejected figures in suits and caps of greyish-blue flannel, huddled about a stove. Some were playing at cards, others at dominoes. The murmur of their voices ascended and hummed in the little passage.

"Hist! Your friend is below there, if you care to have a peep at him."

But Dorothea had already drawn back. All this spying and listening revolted her. The polite Commandant noted the movement.

"You prefer that he should be fetched at once?" He stepped past them into the corridor. "Smithers!" he called. "Smithers!"

A hospital orderly appeared at a door almost opposite the passage, and saluted.

"Run down to the Convalescent Ward and fetch up Number Two-six-seven-two.—I know the number of each of my children. I never make a mistake," he confided in Dorothea's ear. "As quick as you can, please! Stay; you may add that some visitors have called and wish to speak with him."

The orderly saluted again, and hurried off.

"You wish, of course, to see him alone together?"

"I think," answered Endymion, slowly, "my sister would prefer a word or two with him alone."

"Certainly. Will you step into the surgery, Miss Westcote?" He indicated the door at which the orderly had appeared. "Smithers will not take two minutes in fetching the prisoner; and perhaps, if you will excuse us, a visit to the hospital itself will repay your brother. We are rather proud of our sanitation here: a glance over our arrangements—five minutes only——"

Endymion, at a nod from Dorothea, permitted himself to be led away by the inexorable man.

She watched them to the end of the corridor, and had her hand on the surgery door to push it open, when a voice from below smote her ears.

"Number Two-six-seven-two to come to the surgery at once, to see visitors!"

The voice rang up through the little passage behind her. She turned; the door at the end of it stood half-open; beyond it she saw the bars of the gallery, and through these a space of white-washed wall at the end of the ward.

She was turning again, when a babble of voices answered the orderly's announcement. "Raoul! Raoul!" half-a-dozen were calling, and then one spoke up sharp and distinct:

"Tenez, mon bonhomme, ce sera votre *gilet*, à coup sûr!"

A burst of laughter followed.

"C'est son *gilet*—his little Waistcoat—à chauffer la poitrine——"

"Des visiteurs, dit-il? Voyons, coquin, n'y a-t-il pas par hasard une visiteuse de la partie?"

"Une 'Waistcoat' par exemple?—de quarante ans environ, le drap un peu râpé . . ."

"Qui se nomme Dorothée—ce que veut dire le gilet dieudonné . . ."

"Easy now!" the Orderly's voice remonstrated. "Easy, I tell you, ye born mill-clappers! There's a lady in the party, if that's what you're asking."

Dorothea put out a hand against the jamb of the surgery door, to steady herself. She heard the smack of a palm below and some one uttered a serio-comic groan.

"Enfoncé! Il m'a parié dix sous qu'elle viendrait avant le jour de l'an, et aussi du tabac avec tout le Numéro Six. Nous en ferons la dot de Mademoiselle!" The fellow burst out singing—

"J'ai du bon tabac
Dans ma tabatière."

"Dites donc, mon petit,"—but the cheerful epithet he bestowed on Raoul is unquotable here—"Elle ne fume pas, votre Anglaise? Elle n'est pas Créole, c'est entendu."

Dorothea had stepped into the surgery. A small round table stood in the middle of the room; she caught at the edge of it and rested so for a moment, for the walls seemed to be swaying and she durst not lift her hands to shut out the roars of laughter. They rang in her ears and shouted and stunned her. Her whole body writhed.

The hubbub below sank to a confused murmur. She heard footsteps in the corridor—the firm tramp of the orderly followed by the shuffle of list slippers.

"Number Two-six-seven-two is outside, ma'am. Am I to show him in?"

She bent her head and moved towards the fireplace. She heard him shuffle in, and the door shut behind him. Still she did not turn.

"Dorothea!"—his voice shook with joy, with passion. How well she knew that deep Provençal

tremolo. She could have laughed aloud in her bitterness.

"Dorothea!"

She faced him at length. He stood there, stretching out both hands to her. He was handsome as ever, but pale and sadly pinched. Beyond all doubt he had suffered. His grey-blue hospital suit hung about him in folds.

In her eyes he read at once that something was wrong—but without comprehending.

"You sent for me," he stammered; "you have come——"

She found her voice and, to her surprise, it was quite firm.

"Yes, we have brought your release," she said; and, watching his eyes, saw the joy leap up in them, saw it quenched the next instant as he composed his features to a fond solicitude for her.

"But *you?*" he murmured. "What has happened? Tell me—no, do not draw away! Your hand, at least."

Contempt, for herself or for him, gave her a moment's strength, but it broke down again.

"It is horrible!" was all she answered, and looked about her with a shiver.

"Ah, the place frightens you! Well," he laughed, reassuringly, "it frightened me at first. But for the thought of you, dearest, to comfort——"

She stepped past him and opened the door. For a moment a wild notion seized him that she was escaping, and he put out an imploring hand; but he saw that, with her hand on the jamb, she was listening, and he, too, listened. The voices in the Convalescent Ward came up to them, scarcely muffled, through the low passage, and with them a cackling laugh. Then he understood.

Their eyes met. He bowed his head.

"Nevertheless, I have suffered."

He said it humbly, after many seconds, and in a voice so low that it seemed a second or two before she heard. For the first time she put out a hand and touched his sleeve.

"Yes, you have suffered, and for me. Let me go on believing that. You did a noble thing, and I shall try to remember you by it—to remember that you were capable of it. 'It was for my sake,' I shall say, and then I shall be proud. Oh, yes, sometimes I shall be very proud! But in love——"

Her voice faltered, and he looked up sharply.

"In love"—she smiled, but passing faintly—"it's the little things, is it not? It's the little things that count."

She touched his sleeve again, and passed into the room, leaving him there at a standstill, as Endymion and the Commandant came round the corner at the far end of the corridor.

"Excuse me," said Endymion, and, stepping past Raoul without a glance, looked into the surgery. After a moment he shut the door quietly, and, standing with his back to it, addressed the prisoner: "I perceive, sir, that my sister has told you the news. We have effected an exchange for you, and the Commandant tells me that to-morrow, if the roads permit, you will be sent down to Plymouth and released. It is unnecessary for you to thank me; it would, indeed, be offensive. I wish you a safe passage home, and pray heaven to spare me the annoyance of seeing your face again."

As Raoul bowed and moved away, dragging his feet weakly in their list slippers, Mr. Westcote turned to the Commandant, who during this address had kept a discreet distance.

"With your leave, we will continue our stroll, and return for my sister in a few minutes."

The Commandant jumped at the suggestion.

Dorothea heard their footsteps retreating, and knew that her brother's thoughtfulness had found her this short respite. She had dropped into the orderly's chair, and now bowed her head upon the prison doctor's ledger, which lay open on the table before it.

"Oh, my love! How could you do it? How could you? How could you?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE NEW DOROTHEA.

Two hours later they set out on their homeward journey.

The Commandant, still voluble, escorted them to the gate. As Dorothea climbed into the chaise and Endymion shook up the rugs and cushions, a large brown paper parcel rolled out upon the snow. She gave a little cry of dismay :

" The drawings ! "

" Eh ? "

" We forgot to deliver them."

" Oh, confound the things ! "

Endymion was for pitching them back into the chaise.

" But no ! " she entreated. " Why, Narcissus believes it was to deliver them that we came ! "

So the Commandant amiably charged himself to hand the parcel to M. Raoul, and waved his adieux with it as the chaise rolled away.

Of what had passed between Dorothea and Raoul

at the surgery door Endymion knew nothing; but he had guessed at once, and now was assured by the tone in which she had spoken of the drawings, that the chapter was closed, the danger past. Coming, brother and sister had scarcely exchanged a word for miles together. Now they found themselves chatting without effort about the landscape, the horses' pace, the Commandant and his hospitality, the arrangements of the prison, and the prospects of a cosy dinner at Moreton Hampstead. It was all the smallest of small talk, and just what might be expected of two reputable middle-aged persons returning in a post-chaise from a mild jaunt; yet beneath it ran a current of feeling. In their different ways, each had been moved; each had relied upon the other for a degree of help which could not be asked in words, and had not been disappointed.

Now that Dorothea's infatuation had escaped all risk of public laughter, Endymion could find leisure to admire her courage in confessing, in persisting until the wrong was righted, and, now at the last, in shutting the door upon the whole episode.

And, now at the last, having shut the door upon it, Dorothea could reflect that her brother, too, had suffered. She knew his pride, his sensitiveness, his mortal dread of ridicule. In the smart of his wound he had turned and rent her cruelly, but had recovered himself and defended her loyally from

worse rendings. She remembered, too, that he had distrusted Raoul from the first.

He had been right. But had she been wholly wrong?

In the dusk of the fifth evening after their departure the chaise rolled briskly in through Bayfield great gates and up the snowy drive. Almost noiselessly though it came, Mudge had the door thrown wide and stood ready to welcome them, with Narcissus behind in the comfortable glow of the hall.

Dorothea's limbs were stiff, and on alighting she steadied herself for a moment by the chaise-door before stepping in to kiss her brother. In that moment her eyes took one backward glance across the park and rested on the lights of Axcester glimmering between the naked elms.

"Well," demanded Narcissus, after exchange of greetings, "and what did he say about the drawings?"

Dorothea had not expected the question in this form, and parried it with a laugh:

"You and your drawings! I declare"—she turned to Endymion—"he has been thinking of them all the time, and affects no concern in our adventures!"

"Which, nevertheless, have been romantic to the last degree," he added, playing up to her.

"My dear Dorothea—" Narcissus expostulated.

"But you are not going to evade me by any such tricks," she interrupted, sternly; "for that is what it comes to. I left you with the strictest orders to take care of yourself, and you ought to know that I shall answer nothing until you have been catechised. What have you been eating?"

"My *dear* Dorothea!"

Narcissus gazed helplessly at Mudge; but Mudge had been seized with a flurry of his own, and misinterpreted the look as well as the stern question.

"I—I reckon 'tis *me*, Miss," he confessed. "Being partial to onions, and taking that liberty in Mr. Endymion's absence, knowing his dislike of the effluvium——"

Such are the pitfalls of a guilty conscience on the one hand, and, on the other, of being unexpectedly clever.

An hour later, at dinner, Narcissus was informed that the drawings had been conveyed to M. Raoul, who, doubtless, would return them with hints for correction.

"But had he nothing to say at the time?"

"For my part," said Endymion, sipping his wine, "I addressed but one sentence to him; and Dorothea, I dare say, exchanged but half a dozen. Considering the shortness of the interview, and that our mission—at least, our ostensible mission"—Endy-

mion glanced at Dorothea, with a smile at his own *finesse*—"was to carry him news of his release, you will admit——"

"Oh—ah!—to be sure; I had forgotten the release," muttered Narcissus, and was resigned.

"By the way," Dorothea asked, after a short pause, "what is happening at 'The Dogs' to-night? All the windows are lit up in the Orange Room. I saw it as I stepped out of the chaise."

"Yes; I have to tell you"—Narcissus turned towards his brother—"that during your absence another of the prisoners has found his discharge—the old Admiral."

"Dead?"

"He died this morning: but you knew, of course, it was only a question of days. Rochambeau was with him at the last. He has shown great devotion."

"You have made all arrangements, of course?" For Narcissus was Acting-Commissary in his brother's absence.

"I rode in at once on hearing the news, which Zeally brought before daylight; and found the Lodge"—this was a Masonic Lodge formed among the prisoners, and named by them *La Paix Désirée*—"anxious to pay him something more than the full rites. With my leave they have hired the Orange Room, and turned it into a *chapelle ardente;*

and there, I believe, he is reposing now, poor old fellow."

"He has no kith nor kin, I understand."

"None. He was never married, and his relatives went in the Terror—the most of them (so Rochambeau tells me) in a single week."

Dorothea had heard the same story from the General and from Raoul. To this old warrior his Emperor had been friends, kindred, wife, and children—nay, almost God. He had enjoyed Napoleon's favour, and followed his star from the days of the Directory: in that favour and the future of France beneath that star his hopes had begun and ended. His private ambitions he had resigned without a word on the day when he put to sea out of Brest, under order from Paris, to perform a feat he knew to be impossible, with ships ill-found, undermanned, and half-victualled by cheating contractors: and he sailed cheerfully, believing himself sacrificed to some high purpose of his master's. When, the sacrifice made, he learned that the contractors slandered him to cover their own villainy, and that Napoleon either believed them or was indifferent, his heart broke. Too proud at first, he had ended by drawing up a statement and forwarding it from his captivity, with a demand for an enquiry. The answer to this was—the letter which never came.

Dorothea thought of the room where she had

danced and been happy : the many lights, the pagan figures merry-making on the panels, the goddess on the ceiling with her cupids and scattered roses, and, in the centre of it all, that dead face, incongruous and calm.

How small had been her tribulation beside his! And it was all over for him now—wages taken, account sealed up for judgment, *parole* ended, and no heir to trouble over him or his good name.

Next morning she rode into Axcester, as well to do some light shopping as because it seemed an age since her last visit, which, to be sure, was absurd, and she knew it. Happening to meet General Rochambeau, she drew rein and very gently offered her condolence on the loss of his old friend.

The General pressed her hand gratefully.

"Ah, never pity him, Mademoiselle. He carries a good pass for the Elysian Fields."

"And that is——?"

"The Emperor's *tabatière;* and, my faith! Miss Dorothea, there will be sneezings in certain quarters when he opens it there.

Il a du bon tabac
Dans sa tabatière

has the Admiral. He had for you (if I may say it) a quite extraordinary respect and affection. The saints rest his brave soul!"

The General lifted his *tricorne*. He never understood the tide of red which surged over Dorothea's face; but she conquered it, and went on to surprise him further:

"I heard of this only last night. We have been visiting Dartmoor, my brother and I, with a release for—for that M. Raoul."

"So I understood." He noted that her confusion had gone as suddenly as it came.

"But since I am back in time, and it appears I was so fortunate as to win his regard, I would ask to see him—if it be permitted, and I may have your escort."

"Certainly, Mademoiselle. You will, perhaps, wish to consult your brother though?"

"I see no necessity," she answered.

The General was not the only one to discover a new and firmer note in Dorothea's voice. Life at Bayfield slipped back into its old comfortable groove, but the brothers fell—and one of them consciously—into a habit of including her in their conversations and even of asking her advice. One day there arrived a bulky parcel for Narcissus; so bulky indeed and so suspiciously heavy, that it bore signs of several agitated official inspections, and nothing short of official deference to Endymion (under cover of whom it was addressed) could account for its having

come through at all. For it came from France. It contained a set of the Bayfield drawings exquisitely cut in stone; and within the cover was wrapped a lighter parcel addressed to Miss Dorothea Westcote —a rose-tree, with a packet of seeds tied about its root.

No letter accompanied the gift, at the sentimentality of which she found herself able to smile. But she soaked the root carefully in warm water, and smiled again at herself as she planted it at the foot of the glacis beneath her boudoir window—the very spot where Raoul had fallen. Against expectation —for the journey had sorely withered it—the plant throve. She lived to see it grown into a fine Provence rose, draping the whole south-east corner of Bayfield with its yellow bloom.

"After all," she said one afternoon, stepping back in the act of pruning it, "provided one sees things in their right light and is not a fool——"

But this was long after the time of which we are telling.

Folks no longer smile at sentiment. They laugh it down: by which, perhaps, no great harm would be done if their laughter came through the mind; but it comes through the passions, and at the best chastises one excess by another—a weakness by a rage, which is weakness at its worst. I fear Dorothea may be injured in the opinion of many by the truth

—which, nevertheless, has to be told—that her recovery was helped not a little by sentiment. What? Is a poor lady's heart to be in combustion for a while and then—pf!—the flame expelled at a blast, with all that fed it? That is the heroic cure, no doubt; but either it kills or leaves a room swept and garnished, inviting devils. In short it is the way of tragedy, and for tragedy Dorothea had no aptitude at all. She did what she could—tidied up.

For an instance.—She owned a small book which had once belonged to a namesake of hers—a Dorothea Westcote who had lived at the close of the seventeenth and opening of the eighteenth centuries, a grand-daughter of the first Westcote of Bayfield, married (so said the family history) in 1704 to a squire from across the Devonshire border. The book was a slender one, bound in calf, gilt-edged, and stamped with a gold wreath in the centre of each cover. Dorothea called it an album; but the original owner had simply written in, "Dorothea Westcote, her book," on the first page, with the date 1687 below, and filled four-and-twenty of its blank pages with poetry (presumably her favourite pieces), copied in a highly ornate hand. Presumably also she had wearied of the work, let the book lie, and coming to it later, turned it upside down and started with a more useful purpose: for three pages at the end contained several household recipes in the same

writing grown severer, including "Garland Wine (Mrs. Massiter's Way)" and "A good Cottage Pie for a Pore Person."

Now the family history left no doubt that in 1687 this Dorothy had been a bare fifteen years old; and although some of the entries must have been made later (for at least two of them had not been composed at the time), the bulk of the poems proved her a sprightly young lady whenever she transcribed them. Indeed, some were so very free in calling a spade a spade, that our Dorothea, having annexed the book, years ago, on the strength of her name, and dipped within, had closed it in sudden virgin terror and thrust it away at the back of her wardrobe.

There it had lain until disinterred in the hurried search for linen for Mr. Raoul's wound. Next morning Dorothea was on the point of hiding it again, when, as she opened the covers idly, her eyes fell on these lines—

> "But at my back I alwaies hear
> Time's winged chariot hurrying near;
> And yonder all before me lie
> Desarts of vast Eternitie . . ."

She read on. The poem, after all, turned out to be but a lover's appeal to his mistress to give over coyness and use time while she might; but Dorothea wondered why its solemn language should have hit

her namesake's fancy, and, turning a few more pages, discovered that this merry dead girl had chosen and copied out other verses which were more than solemn. How had she dug these gloomy gems out of Donne, Ford, Webster, and set them here among loose songs and loose epigrams from *Wit's Remembrancer* and the like? for gems they were, though Dorothea did not know it nor whence they came. Dorothea had small sense of poetry: it was the personal interest which led her on. To be sure the little animal (she had already begun to construct a picture of her) might have secreted these things for no more reason than their beauty, as a squirrel will pick up a ruby ring and hide it among his nuts. But why were they all so darkly terrible? Had she, being young, been afraid to die? Rather it seemed as if now and then, in the midst of her mirth, she had paused and been afraid to live.

And in the end she had married a Devonshire squire, which on the face of it is no darkly romantic thing to do. But it was over the maiden that our Dorothea pondered, until by and by the small shade took features and a place in her leisure time: a very companionable shade, though tantalising; and innocent, though given to mischievously sportive hints. Dorothea sometimes wondered what her own fate would have been, with this naughtiness in her young blood—and this seriousness.

It was sentiment, of course; but it is also a fact that this ghost of a kinswoman brought help to her. For such a hurt as hers the specific is to get away from self and look into such human thought as is kindly yet judicial. Some find this help in philosophy, many more in wise friends. Dorothea had no philosophy, and no human being to consult; for admirably as Endymion had behaved, he remained a person with obvious limits. The General held aloof: she had no reason to fear that he suspected her secret. And so *Natura inventrix*, casting about for a cure, found and brought her this companion of her own sex from between the covers of a book.

I set down the fact merely and its share in Dorothea's recovery.

CHAPTER XII.

GENERAL ROCHAMBEAU TELLS A STORY; AND THE TING-TANG RINGS FOR THE LAST TIME.

More than a year had passed when, one February morning, as he left the breakfast table, Endymion handed Dorothea a slip of paper.

"Do you think we can entertain at dinner next Wednesday? If you can manage it, I wish these invitations written out and despatched before noon."

"Next Wednesday?" Dorothea's eyebrows went up. Invitations to dine at Bayfield had always, as we know, been issued just three weeks ahead.

"If it will not inconvenience you," he answered; and his manner added, as plainly as words, "I beg that you will not press for my reasons." He was booted already for his ride into Axcester.

Dorothea ran her eye down the list: The Vicomte de Tocqueville, General Rochambeau. . . ." All the prisoners of distinction were included as well as the chief notables of the neighbourhood, which made it a long one, even without a full balance of ladies.

She went off to her room at once and penned the letters—twenty-five in all.

Naturally, this break in the Bayfield custom set speculation going among the invited; but it is doubtful if Narcissus, any more than Dorothea, knew the reason of it. And on Wednesday, when the guests assembled, the only one who might be suspected of sharing Endymion's secret was (oddly enough) General Rochambeau. The old fellow seemed ten years younger, and wore an air of sportiveness, almost of raillery, as he caught his host's eye. The compliments he paid Lady Bateson across the table were prodigious, and gave that good soul a hazy sensation of being wafted back to the court of Louis XV. and behaving brilliantly under the circumstances.

"Really, my dear Mr. Westcote," she protested at length, being a chartered utterer of indiscretions which (as she delighted to prove) Endymion would not tolerate in others, but took from her and allowed, with a magisterial smile, to pass—"really, I trust you have not taken off the General's *parole*, or to-morrow I shall have to lock my gates for fear of a chaise-and-pair."

"Ah, to-morrow!" the General echoed, turning to Endymion, with a twinkle of *malice* in his eye. "But when Mr. Westcote releases us, it will be *en masse*; and then, believe me, I shall come with

an army, since I underrate neither the strength of the fortress nor the feeling of the country."

"That reminds me," put in a Mr. Saxby, of Yeovil, or near by, "we have heard of no escape or attempts at escape from Axcester this winter. I congratulate you, Westcote—if the General will not think it offensive."

"Reassure yourself, my dear sir." General Rochambeau bowed. "No," he continued, lifting his eyes for a moment towards Dorothea, "in one way or another we are rid of our fence-breakers, and the rest must share the credit with our Commissary."

"And yet the temptation—" began Lady Bateson.

"Is great, Madame, for some temperaments. But the Vicomte, here, and I have tried to teach our poor compatriots that in resisting it they fight for France as surely as if they stormed a breach. And, by the way, I heard a story this morning—if the company would care to hear——"

They begged him to tell it.

"But not if the ladies leave us to our wine." He turned to Dorothea. "If Miss Westcote will rally and stay her forces, good; for, though it came to me casually in a letter, it is a tale of the sort which used to be fashionable in my youth—ah! long before M. le Tocqueville remembers—and for

the telling it demanded an audience of ladies, which must help me, who am rusty, to recapture the style, if I can."

He pushed back his chair and, crossing his legs, leaned forward and pushed his fingers across the polished mahogany till they touched the base of a wine-glass beside his plate. One or two of the guests smiled at this formal opening. The Vicomte's eyes showed something of amusement behind their apathy. But all listened.

"My tale, Miss Dorothea, is of a certain M. Benest, who until a few weeks ago was a prisoner on *parole* in one of your towns on the south coast. He had been *chef de hune* (which, as you know, is chief petty officer) of the *Embuscade* frigate, captured by Sir John Warren. In the action which lost her M. Benest lost a leg, and was placed in an English hospital, where they gave him a wooden one.

"Now how it came about that on his discharge he was allowed to live in a town—call it a village, rather—a haven, at any rate—where for a couple of napoleons he might have found a boat any night of the week to smuggle him over to Roscoff, is more than I can tell you. It may be that he had once borne another name than Benest, one to command privileges: since many of my countrymen, as you know, have found it prudent in recent years to change their names and take up with callings below their

real rank. There, at any rate, he was; and on the day after his arrival, he and the Rector of the parish—who was also a magistrate—took a walk and marked out the bounds together: two miles along the coast to the east, two miles along the coast to the west, and two miles up the valley behind the town. At the end of these two miles the valley itself branched into two and climbed inland, the road branching likewise; and M. Benest's mark was the signpost at the angle.

"Well, at first he walked little, because of his wooden leg. He had lodgings with a widow in a whitewashed cottage overlooking the harbour-side, and seemed happy enough there, tending a monster geranium which grew against the house-wall, or pottering about the quay and making friends with the children. For the children soon picked up an affection for him, seeing that he was never too busy to drop his gardening and come and be umpire at their games of 'tig' or 'prisoners' bars.' Also he had stories for them, and halfpennies or sweetmeats in mysterious pockets, and songs which he taught them: *Giroflé, girofla,* and *Compagnons de la Marjolaine,* and *Les Petits Bateaux*—do you know it?—

'Papa, les p'tits bateaux
Qui vont sur l'eau,
Ont-ils des jambes?
— Mais oui, petit bêta,
S'ils n'en avaient pas, ils n' march'raient pas!'

"In short, M. Benest, with his loose blue coat and three-cornered naval cap, endeared himself to the children, and through the children to everyone.

"It was some time before he began to take walks; and I believe he had been living in the town for six months, when one day, having stumped up the valley road for a change, and just as he was facing about for the return journey, he heard a voice in his own language singing to the air of *Vive Henri Quatre*.

"The voice was shaky and, I dare say, uncertain in its upper notes; but it fetched M. Benest right-about-face again. He perceived that it came from the garden of a solitary cottage up the road, a gunshot and more beyond his signpost. But a tall hedge interrupted his view, and, though he stared long and earnestly, all he could see that day was a pea-stick nodding above it.

"He came again, however,—not the next day, but the day after,—and was rewarded by a glimpse of a white cap with bows which seemed at that distance of a purplish colour. Its wearer was standing in the gateway and exchanging a word with the Rector, who had reined up his horse in the road.

"M. Benest walked home and made inquiries; but his landlady could only tell him that the cottage was rented by two ladies, sisters,—she had heard that they came from the West Indies,—who saw

nobody, but wished only to be let alone. One of them, who suffered from an incurable complaint, was never seen ; the other could be seen on fine days in her garden, where she worked vigorously ; and what the pair lived on was a mystery, for they bought nothing in the town or of their neighbours.

" On learning this, M. Benest became very cunning indeed. He bought a fishing rod.

" For I ought to have told you that a stream ran down the valley beside the road, and it contained trout—perhaps as many as a dozen. M. Benest had no desire to catch them ; but, you see, he was forced to acquire some show of expertness in order to deceive the wayfarers who paused and watched him ; and in time (I am told) the fish, after being unhooked once or twice and restored apologetically to the water, came to enjoy disconcerting him. You must understand that he had no foolish illusions concerning the white cap and purplish ribbons—the Mademoiselle Henriette, as he discovered she was called. He only knew that here were two women, his compatriots, poor certainly, often hungry perhaps, shipwrecked so close to him upon this corner of (pardon me, Miss Dorothea) an unfriendly land, yet divided from any comfort he could bring by fifty yards of road and his word of honour. She must be of the true blood of France who quavered out *Vive Henri Quatre* so resolutely over her digging and

hoeing: but the sound of a French voice might hearten her as hers had heartened him. Therefore he sang lustily while he angled—which is not good for sport; and when he caught a fish, broke into pæans addressed less to the captive—with which, between you and me, he was secretly annoyed—than to an ear unseen, perhaps a quarter of a mile away.

"But there came a day—how shall I tell it?—when calamity fell upon the cottage. For some time the farmers up the valley had been missing sheep. What so easy now as to suspect the two women who were never known to buy either bread or butcher's meat? You can guess? A rabble marched up from the town and broke in upon them. It found nothing, of course; and I am told that at sight of the face of the poor elder sister it fled back in panic, leaving the place a wreck.

"It so happened that M. Benest had pretermitted his angling, that afternoon, for a stroll along the cliff: but he heard the news on his return, from his landlady, while he sat at tea—that is to say, he heard a part of it, for before the story was out he had set down his teacup, caught up hat and stick, and stumped out of the house. The most of the townspeople were indoors at tea, discussing the sensation; the few he encountered had no greeting from him. He looked neither to the right nor to the left; had

no ears for his friends, the trout, as they rose at the evening flies. He reached the signpost and—walked past it! He stumped straight up to the garden gate, which stood ajar, and pushed it wide with his stick.

"There were signs of trampling on the flower-beds; but—for it was July—the whole garden blazed with hollyhocks, œillets, sweet Williams, sweet peas, above all with that yellow flower—mimulus, monkey flower, is it not?—which grows so profusely in gardens beside streams. The air was weighted with scent of the réséda and of the jasmine which climbed the wall and almost choked the roses.

"The cottage door stood ajar also. He thrust this open too, and for the first time stood face to face with Mademoiselle Henriette.

"She sat by the kitchen table, with one arm flung across it, and her body bowed with grief. At her feet lay a trodden bunch of the monkey flowers: and at the tap-tap of his wooden leg on the threshold she sprang up and faced him, across the yellow blossoms.

"'Mademoiselle,' he began, 'I have just learnt—but it is an infamy! *Permettez*—I am French, I also, though you do not know me perhaps.'

"And with that M. Benest stammered and came to a halt, for her eyes were worse than woeful. They

were accusing—yes, accusing *him*. Of what? *Nom de tonnerre*, what had he done?

"'You, Monsieur! *You*—an officer of France!'

"'*Mais quel rapport y a-t-il?*'

"'Your *parole*, Monsieur!'

"'*Peste!* I forgot,' said M. Benest, half to himself.

"'Forgot? Forgot your *parole? Mais écoutez donc! Nous savons souffrir, nous autres françaises . . . Et la petite qui meurt—et moi qui mourrai presqu' à l'heure—mais nous nous en tenons à ne pas déshonorer la patrie à la fin. Ça finira bien, sous-officier—allez-vous en. Mais allez!*'

"She stamped her foot upon the flowers, and M. Benest turned and fled from her. Nay, in his haste, taking a short-cut towards the signpost, he plunged his wooden leg deep in the marsh, and tumbled helpless, overwhelmed with shame.

"He never passed the signpost again, nor caught another glimpse of Mademoiselle Henriette's cap. Three days later the Rector broke into the cottage and discovered her seated, dead and stiff, her hands stained with digging her sister's grave.

"And the cottage had no new tenant. Only M. Benest continued to eye it wistfully, as he cast his flies and pondered on his offence, which she had died without forgiving.

"But one July, two years after her death, a patch of gold appeared on the marsh below the hedge—a patch of the monkey-flower. Some seeds had been blown thither, or carried down by the stream.

"Next July the patch had doubled its length.

"'The flowers are travelling towards me,' said M. Benest.

"And year by year the stream brought them nearer. That was a terrible July for him when they came within two feet of the signpost; but he would not stretch a hand beyond it.

"'She coquets with her forgiveness, the poor Mademoiselle Henriette. But I can wait: *'faut pas déshonorer la patrie à la fin!*'

"Before the next July he had made sure of one plant at least on his side of the signpost; and fished beside it day after day, fearful lest some animal should browse upon it. But when the happy morning came for it to open, and M. Benest knelt beside his prize, he drew back a hand.

"'Is it *quite* open?' he asked. 'Better wait, since all is safe, for the sun to warm it a little longer.'

"And he waited, until a trout, to remind him, perhaps, took a fly with a splash beneath his nose. Then, with a start, M. Benest's fingers closed and snapped off the yellow blossom.

"'She has forgiven me,' said he. 'Now I can forgive myself.'"

For a moment or two, though his story was ended, the General continued to toy with the stem of his wine glass. One or two of the guests cried "Bravo!" But Lady Bateson's eyes were wet, and Dorothea gazed hard for a while into the polished surface of the mahogany before she recalled herself, and, with a nod, swept the ladies away to the drawing-room.

Later, in a pause between two songs, the General dropped into a seat beside her.

"Can you guess who sent me that story?" he asked. "It was M. Raoul; and he travelled across from Plymouth in the ship with this M. Benest, who happened to get his exchange at about the same time. It was clever of him to worm out the story—if, indeed, he did not invent it. But that young man has genius for pathos."

"I did not know that you corresponded."

"Indeed, nor did I. He chose to write. I may answer; and, again, I may not. To tell you the truth, I have never been sure if we condemned him quite justly."

Dorothea found herself able to look straight into the kindly old eyes.

"It was a beautiful story. Did you tell it for me?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, in thanks and in contrition. We are all prisoners in this world; but while it is certain you have made fortitude easier for us, I

have suspected that there was a time when I, for one, might have been bolder and repaid you, but stood aside. Also, I think you no longer require help."

"No longer, General. But what you say is true: we are all prisoners here, or sentries at the best." And Dorothea, resting her fan on her lap, let these lines fall from her, not consciously quoting, but musing on each word as it fell:

> "Brutus and Cato might discharge their souls,
> And give them furloughs for another world;
> But we, like sentries, are obliged to stand
> In starless nights, and wait the appointed hour."

The General stared.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, what poet taught you that?"

"It was a kinswoman," she answered, and caught herself blushing. "I do not know the author."

The secret of the Commissary's dinner-party came out early next morning, when the call came for the prisoners to leave Axcester. And, whenever Dorothea looked back on this epoch in her life, what she found most wonderful was the suddenness of its end. As day broke in a drizzle, and before she was well awake, a troop of dragoons, followed by a company of the 52nd Regiment of foot, passed the Bayfield gates on the way to Axcester. The troopers entered the town while the Ting-tang was sounding,

and before the roll could be called the prisoners were surrounded. Their release had come; and though many had sighed for it for years, it found them quite unprepared.

Their release had come; but first they must be marched through the length of the country to Kelso, there to await the formalities of exchange. At four in the afternoon the infantry marched out with the first great batch. Early next morning the rest—owners of furniture, granted a few hours to arrange for its storage or sale—followed their comrades. There was no cloud of dust upon the road for Dorothea to watch. They departed in sheets of rain and under the dusk of dawn. She never again saw General Rochambeau.

It is recorded that in his fifty-seventh year Endymion Westcote married (but the bride was not Lady Bateson), and that children were born to him. Narcissus lived on at Bayfield and compiled at his leisure a *History of Axcester*, which mentions the decoration of the Orange Room by "a young Frenchman of talent, who has been good enough to assist the author in a most important work." But Dorothea preferred her independence and a cottage not far from the bridge, where Endymion's children might romp as they listed, but never seemed to disturb its exquisite order.

TOM TIDDLER'S GROUND.

TOM TIDDLER'S GROUND.

PROLOGUE.

THE LADY OF THE ISLES.

"Here lies a most beautiful lady,
Light of heart and step was she;
I think she was the most beautiful lady
That ever was in the West Countrie.
But beauty vanishes, beauty passes,
However rare, rare it be,
And when I crumble who shall remember
That lady of the West Countrie?"

WALTER DE LA MARE.

SHOULD you ask who brought prosperity to the Islands—or brought it back after long years of estrangement—nine Islanders out of ten would have answered "The Mistress;" meaning the sad and beautiful lady who dwelt at Iniscaw, and now sang to herself, after having sung in capital cities to great audiences, with kings and queens eager to listen. In addition to her beauty and her voice (which in itself was a miracle) God had given

her courage, so that she kept her light step; but she had lost her lightness of heart ever since she had found love too late, and discovered about the same time that her voice was passing with her beauty.

She was Lady Proprietress of the Islands, holding them on a lease from Queen Victoria. "All those Her Majesty's territories and rocks," so the legal wording ran, "together with all sounds, harbours and sands within the circuit of the said Isles, and all lands, tenements, meadows, pastures, grounds, feedings, fishings, mines of tin, lead and coals, and all profits of the same"—But there were no such mines, by the way, and by consequence no such profits—"and all marshes, void grounds, woods, underwoods, rents, reversions, services and all other profits, rights, commodities, advantages and emoluments within the said Isles; and a moiety of all shipwreck, the other moiety to be received by the Lords Commissioners of Admiralty."

Her predecessor, being a man, had also been sole justiciary, with full power to hear, examine and finally determine all plaints, suits, matters, actions and demands whatever, moved and depending between party and party inhabiting the same Isles—all heresies and treasons excepted—with all controversies or causes touching life or member of man, title of land, or ships or other things belonging to

the High Court of Admiralty. She, as a woman, assigned the Commission of the Queen's Peace into the hands of three Magistrates, with a solitary policeman to help them; but, for the rest, within the small realm she was sovereign more absolute than Queen Victoria, who ruled somewhere on "the Main"—a vaguely realised land, thirty miles away, discernible on clear mornings as a cloud upon the sea.

For the Islands, ridged with reefs and dotted with sentinel lighthouses, lie off the west coast of England, well out in the Atlantic, in the mouth of the warm Gulf Stream. Six are inhabited, and contain between them less than three thousand acres suitable for grazing or tillage; the rest, eighteen or twenty in number, are mere islets, rocky and barren, on which the seabirds breed.

The rock is granitic, the soil light and friable, without width or depth for serious husbandry; and a hundred years ago the inhabitants subsisted almost wholly by fishing and by burning down the seaweed for "kelp," which went to Bristol to the making of glass and soap. Times had bettered when the increase of our sea-borne trade brought work to the pilots on St. Ann's, the southernmost island, and every long spell of easterly wind might be counted on to crowd the roadstead with vessels "waiting for orders." About that time, too, the

farmers on St. Lide's (the largest island), Iniscaw, Brefar and Saaron had taken to growing early potatoes for the English market, planting them in shallow rows with a bare covering of soil—the Islands know no frost—and harvesting them a month ahead of growers on the Main.

During her girlhood—for the Lady was native to her realm—these operations had been in full swing, and she could remember the boats arriving in April with gangs of diggers hired over from England to save the crops, which in prosperous years would touch a thousand tons. But to get the freight across to the Main and by rail to London cost forty-five shillings a ton; and when Malta, Algiers, and the Canaries started to compete at sea-borne rates of thirty shillings or thereabouts, the Islanders' profit diminished, until a crop scarcely paid for saving. This happened just as steam started in earnest to sweep the old sailing vessels off the face of the waters, and the island pilots, scarcely realising their doom, would lie off for days and nights together before they fell in with a tall ship to signal them. In brief, the Islands had fallen back into hard poverty when the Lady returned to them to take up her possessions.

Now though she lived remote from the daily life of her people, and in those early days was known to them for the most part as a voice singing wonderful

songs to herself in her charmed garden amid the tide races, the Lady was in fact a shrewd woman of business. She had noted, on her visits to London, that Londoners, as they grew prosperous, were growing ever fonder of flowers; that not only did the great houses, the hotels, the restaurants require flowers for their dinner tables, but even the poor clerk pinched his pocket for a bunch to carry home.

One June morning, at the fag-end of a masked ball at Covent Garden, she had spent a couple of hours in the flower-market, wandering in the early daylight from stall to stall as the carts rumbled in and the auction assembled; and the buyers and sellers had wondered at the business-like questions this exquisite visitant in Watteau gown and satin shoes put to them concerning prices, freights, discounts, demand and supply.

She learned from them that the market was hungriest in early spring, between the New Year and Lent, when open-air flowers were few or none. She recalled the sweet narcissi that, home in the Islands, bloomed in late February and early March; not only the common Lent-lily, but tazettas—"Island Whites" or "Holy-vales"—beneath the apple trees at Holy Vale Farm on St. Lide's; "Grand Monarque's" within the tumble-down walls of the Fort on Garrison Hill; "Island Whites" again, intermixed with "Solidors" (Soleils d'or), in the meadow

below her own Abbey House on Iniscaw, fringing the shores of the freshwater lake that had served the old monks for fish-pond. On her return to the Islands she had dropped a hint to Farmer Banford of Holy Vale, that here, maybe, was a trade worth starting.

"What!" said he. "In they old things?"

"Ah," she replied, "because flowers are beautiful you think it womanish even to consider them!"

"Beauty doesn't pay." Farmer Banford shook his head.

"You are wrong, my friend," she assured him, with one of her puzzling smiles. "And, what is more, many things that don't pay are well worth paying for. I will leave this address with you, at any rate, and you can think it over."

Next spring, early one fine February morning, as the small mail-packet *Lady of the Isles* was getting up steam for her return passage to the Main, Farmer Banford came along the quayside at Garland Town (harbour of St. Lide's) with a huge bandbox of cardboard under his arm.

"Hullo, Farmer!" hailed Captain Frank, the skipper. "Bound across for England, hey?"

The farmer grinned.

"Looks like the kind o' trunk I'd be takin', don't it?"

"What's inside?"

"Women's notions. If you must know, my old

missus have a-taken a bee in her cap, and I'm sendin' it to Lunnon for the best advice."

So Mrs. Banford's cap-box travelled up to London, packed with three dozen bunches of "Holyvales," and addressed—

To Mr. SHELLABEAR
Fruit and Flower Merchant
Covent Garden
London
England

With Speed

We shall describe, as well as we may, what prosperity dawned for the Islands from the moment when Mr. Shellabear in Covent Garden lifted the lid of that fateful box. As the farmer's luck spread with his story, and the whole archipelago turned to bulb-growing, all praised the Mistress, her woman's wit and her foresight.

Doubtless she deserved their praises. Yet the gods sometimes hide the secret of a gift, and hide it under the obvious. *Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas.*

It was at least curious that the coming of prosperity should coincide with the coming of the child, John Smith, to the Islands.

CHAPTER I.

JAN.

"Then round went the good ship
And thrice she went round;
When up there stood a guardsman
A naked man and brown,—
Says, 'You are the Queen of Carthage
And gey young to drown;
But hold you my girdle
That goeth me around,
And we'll swim to yon Island
As I will be bound' . . .
'Man, your girdle it is breaking!'
'Nay, 'tis strong yet and sound;
'Twas my heart you felt a-breaking,
But here is dry ground.'
. . . . . .
"With the white sand she cover'd him,
Her wet hair she wound;
'Deo-gracey,' said Zenobia,
'That I am not drown'd!"

Ballad of Queen Zenobia.

THE mail-boat that brought back a letter for Farmer Banford, and in the letter a postal order, arrived in St. Lide's Pool three hours behind her time, having fought the last twelve miles of her passage against a westerly gale. The gale increased at nightfall,

and between midnight and two in the morning blew a hurricane.

Soon after daybreak, in the midst of her dressing, word reached the Lady that a vessel was ashore on the west side of St. Ann's, and fast breaking up. The message came from the coastguard on St. Lide's across the private cable laid for her between that Island and Iniscaw.

On these occasions she was always prompt, yet not recklessly, being in fact knowledgeable of wind and water as any of her boatmen. She gazed southward from her window, and decided that by the time her launch could be put under steam and worked down to the open sound, the wind—which had northered—would have allayed the seas running there, and the traject would be made with little risk.

Nevertheless the small craft had shipped some bucketfuls, and her fires had more than once been in danger, before she weathered the Smith Rocks, that lie off the north-west angle of St. Ann's, and sheered down like a flying fish into smoother waters. The Lady steered, her sea-cloak and blown hair drenched with spray.

"Where was the wreck?" She hailed a pilot-cutter that was moving dead slow off the islets with mainsail reefed and foresheet to windward. The pilot called back through a megaphone that she

had gone down somewhere under their keel and they were creeping about for wreckage. The crew of the coastguard gig, searching closer inshore to the southward, reported the missing vessel to be a barque—an Italian, as they believed—name unknown.

"Anyone saved?"

They shook their heads.

"Lost—all hands!" came the answer.

There would be flotsam, no doubt, close under the cliffs—a lifebelt, maybe, or some fragment of a boat bearing the vessel's name; but in the sea yet running the rocks could not be approached. The Lady gave orders to slow down and join in the search. By this the northerly wind had dispersed the storm-wrack, and as they worked southward and opened Prillis Cove the sun shone through. A small crowd of Islanders—men and women—had gathered on the beach at the head of the cove, and the Lady steered in, if haply they might have news.

They had none. But, while she parleyed with them, over the high ground a woman came running against the wind, waving her arms and pointing southward. The launch was backed, turned, set going again on her way.

Beyond the next point lay another beach of clean white sand, on the upper part of which the cliffs cast their morning shadow; and there, a little outside the

edge of the shadow, between it and the running dazzle of the waves, stood a group of three figures stooping over a fourth. The Lady at first sight of them gave a start, made sign to one of her men near by in the sternsheets, and yielding over the helm to him as he reached out a hand, drew her field-glass from the case slung at her hip, sighted it, and focussed it on the group.

"Set me ashore," she said quietly, fifteen seconds later, lowering the glass. Her face was white to the lips; but the crew did not observe this, so steadily she controlled her voice.

They ran the launch in under the lee of the northerly cliff (where was least run in the waves), and grounded her on the steep-to beach. Two of them leapt out over the bows, and would have made a cradle of their hands to carry their mistress dry-shod over the knee-deep water; but she sprang after them and waded ashore, declining help.

An elderly man—a gentleman by his bearing—came down to the beach to meet her. He wore a brown garment, in length and shape somewhat like the *soutane* of a Roman Catholic priest. He saluted her gravely, respectfully, then lowered his eyes.

"Is he dead?" she asked, her gaze travelling past him to the body beside which his companions—elderly men likewise, the pair of them dressed in ragged blue regimentals—were kneeling as they

attempted to restore animation. They had turned it on its right side and were rubbing the naked body briskly, the one at work at the back beneath the shoulder-blade, the other on the legs from calf to ankle; for it lay with no clothing but trousers of dark sea-cloth, rolled tight and tied above the knees.

Dr. Hervey, the man in the *soutane*, answered with a gesture that might equally well have meant "Yes" or "No."

"How did it happen?"

He cast a hesitating glance at her. Perhaps he was wondering—as she herself wondered—at the strange composure of her voice.

"The Commandant and I were smoking a late pipe together when the rocket went up. He called out the two sergeants here, and in twenty minutes we four were pulling out in the garrison boat, close in the wake of the coastguard. But their gig is a new one and speedy, whereas ours, as you know—and moreover we were none of us young men. We soon lost sight of them in the darkness, and then, coming to open water and finding that she could not live in it, the Commandant gave orders to shape down for the back of the Island. We fetched the lee of it just before the gale worsened, beached the boat in Menadhu Cove, and started to tramp across land. The wind by this time was incredible. On

the high ground we had to make short rushes against it, drop on hands and knees, catch breath and make another rush. It took us till close upon daylight to cross to St. Ann's Down. Then the wind flew almost without warning, and the rest was easy. We came to Chapel Point as the day broke. There was no sign of a ship ; but about half a mile from shore the Commandant spied a man swimming, and pointed him out to us. The man was a negro, and he swam superbly. We watched him, taking turns with the Commandant's glass. He was black as coal, and strapped high on his shoulders—almost on the nape of the neck—he carried a small white bundle. He swam with his head, too, not straight for shore, but letting the tide carry him—only, of course, he could not know of the eddy race that had begun to set, closer inshore. He met it, and after a minute we could see that he was tiring. He made no headway at all, and this within five hundred yards of shore. The Commandant could not stand the sight of it, but stripped, for all we could do to prevent him, and swam out to help. The black man, when he reached him, would take no help, but passed over the bundle and swam in the Commandant's wake, maybe for half a minute. The heart had gone out of his strokes though, and presently he went out of sight without so much as a cry. At all events the Commandant could have

heard none, for he swam on some way before looking back. I was watching all the while through the glass. When he looked and the man had disappeared, he seemed to tread water for a while and to search about, but gave it up and headed for shore again, swimming sideways with one arm and holding the bundle against his right shoulder. He brought it ashore just in that way, not once shifting his hold."

"But I do not understand. He is drowned, you say——"

"I do not say it. We ran down to the shoal water to meet him, and as he found footing he dropped forward into my arms; or rather, he thrust the bundle on me and fell, right there on the water's edge."

"The bundle?"

Dr. Hervey turned and pointed. Some twenty yards up the beach lay a white object which she had taken for the dead man's shirt, tossed there as they had stripped it from him. Why did she walk towards it now and not first towards the body? Why, instead of going straight to the body, had she stood inert, letting the tale fall on her ears half apprehended? She had been swift and resolute enough until the moment when her feet felt the shore. Already three of her crew were gathered beside the two old sergeants, gazing soberly down upon the dead, offering suggestions which—too

well she knew—were vain. Her presence, likewise, would be vain, yet surely she should have been there.

For—after one girlish passion outlasted and almost forgotten—this man, some years ago, had become the chief man in the world for her; the truest, the most honourable, as she knew in her heart that she had been the sovereign and only woman for him. Disparity of years, his poverty, his pride, had set the barrier, and she had never found courage to cast away shame and break it down. For years they had been able to meet and talk with an undisturbed courtesy.

> "Yet what no chance could then reveal
> And neither would be first to own
> Let fate and courage now conceal,
> When truth could bring remorse alone."

Courage? It had been cowardice, rather, on her part,—or so she told herself. And the cowardice must go on, even now. She stepped to the bundle. It was of linen, soaked with salt water; and within it, stark naked, twisting his small legs while he cried, lay an infant—a man-child. In the bass of the waves on the sand she had caught no sound of the treble wailing. She stooped and lifted him in her arms. With the edge of her cloak she wiped away some of the brine from the creases of his small body;

and the child, ceasing his wail, looked up into her eyes and crowed with glee.

"Venus the sea-born mothering Cupid!" muttered Dr. Hervey.

But at this moment the Lady, looking over her shoulder, thrust the child on him with a gesture of repugnance. Her eyes had fallen on the two old sergeants, who had laid their dead master over on his back and were vainly endeavouring to coax back the living breath, raising his arms and anon pressing the elbows back against the sides—all with the dull, dogged motions of a military drill.

"Ah, tell them to stop!" she entreated. "He has had enough of it. Cannot they see that his heart is broken?"

CHAPTER II.

STAR CASTLE.

UBIQUE.

The dead Commandant had carved the word one day, in letters five feet long, out of the short turf on Garrison Hill where it slopes steeply from the Star Castle (as they call its antiquated small citadel) to the cliff overlooking the roadstead and the Western Islands. He had carved it in pure idleness, as an afternoon game to cheat the leisure enforced upon him since Government had dismantled his batteries, drafted his gunners off to the Main, and left him with two old sergeants—Sergeant Archelaus and Sergeant Treacher—to mark time, until the end of his days, by firing a gun at eight in the morning, another at sunset, and in the intervals by ringing the bell over the gate of the Fort every three hours to tell the time to the town below.

Ubique: it was the motto of his old corps, which he still served—as they also serve who only stand and wait. When the word was carved he had a mind to efface it, but had again been too indolent. Now

he was gone, and Sergeant Archelaus kept the letters religiously trimmed with a turf-cutter. Sergeant Archelaus, a bachelor, lived alone and looked after the white-washed empty barracks on the summit of the hill. The other Sergeant—Treacher—was a married man. He and his wife inhabited the Star Castle, and with them lived the boy whom everyone knew as Jan.

Pending discovery of his true name, the Lady had christened him John Smith—Smith from the name of the rocks on which the vessel had split, and John because nothing could be more ordinary. For the rest she seemed to have taken a scunner (as the Scots say) at the helpless babe—an aversion not unmixed with a nameless fear. But something had to be done for him. There is no workhouse on the Islands ; the rule that makes the aged, the infirm, the helpless a sacred charge upon their own kindred works well enough in a community so small that everybody is more or less nearly related to everybody else, and tradition has ordered that all shipwrecked persons must be treated with a like beautiful hospitality. So, as Treacher had been present at the finding of the child, and Mrs. Treacher was a comfortable woman who had reared children, to the Treachers little Jan was assigned by the Lady, whose word none disputed.

To be sure, his was a singular case. The ordinary

outcast from the sea abides but a short time on the Islands, and in due course is returned to home and friends. But to any home, any friends—any origin, in short—of "John Smith" no clue could be discovered. The vessel proved to be an Italian barque, the *Fior dell' Onda,* Glasgow built, and formerly—under the name of *Lochroyan*—owned by a company of Glasgow merchants in whose service she had made half a dozen passages round the Horn. A Genoese firm had purchased and re-named her, and her last port of sailing had been Genoa, whence she was bound in ballast for Fowey, there to load a cargo of china clay. So much the Lady discovered through her agents and through Lloyd's, but the Genoese owners could tell her nothing concerning the child. To their knowledge there had been no woman on board the *Fior dell' Onda* either on this or her previous voyage (Genoa to Famagusta, port of Cyprus, and back).

So Jan lived with the Treachers until his eighth year, sleeping in an attic of the Star Castle, learning his letters in the elementary school down in Garland Town, and picking up a little Latin from Dr. Hervey, who had taken a fancy to the child and a whim to teach him.

His best opportunity for this came with the spring holidays, when the schools on the Islands were closed for a month, that the children might earn

money during the daffodil harvest, the boys by picking flowers, the girls by tying them. Threepence a hundred bunches is the rate, and it is estimated that during these busy weeks no less than a million and a half of flowers are picked on the Islands every day.

But no one hired Jan. He was a solitary, shy boy, and perhaps people forgot him; or perhaps the Treachers, with their pension and their military post and their dignity as care-keepers of the Star Castle in Her Majesty's name, looked upon the new industry with contempt. Consequently Jan found these weeks the loneliest in the year, and on this spring morning was half minded to rebel, having a craze for flowers.

But Dr. Hervey had come to remind him of his Latin lesson. The weather being so fine, they decided to take it out of doors, on a rock a little below the flagstaff—Jan's favourite perch; and there on the slope at their feet they found Sergeant Archelaus busy with his turf-cutting tool.

"Hullo," nodded Sergeant Archelaus. "Come to talk your Latin? Well, here's a piece of Latin for ye!" He spelled out the word letter by letter, "U-b-i-q-u-e. Now what does that mean?"

"*Everywhere*," said the boy promptly. He was still in his declensions, but it seemed to him that he had known the word all his life; and yet he

could not remember that he had ever enquired or been told its meaning.

"Did I tell you that?" asked Dr. Hervey.

"No—o."

Jan felt confused. He could not explain—for it seemed silly—that things were always happening to him in this way.

"*Everywhere* it is," said Sergeant Archelaus. "'Tis the word o' the R'yal Artillery, and their place is the right o' the line. What's Waterloo to your *Everywhere?* . . . I remember the Commandant carving out these very letters. When he'd finished he looks up and says, wi' that smile o' his, '*Everywhere*, Archelaus—and we two be here, of all places!'"

Dr. Hervey muttered some words in a foreign tongue.

"What you say, sir, is always worth listenin' to, but this time I didn't catch," said Sergeant Archelaus, leaning on his turf-cutter.

"I can accept the compliment for once, Archelaus, since it happens that I was quoting an old Greek, who said that 'of illustrious men the whole earth is a sepulchre.'"

"The Commandant was never illustrious, sir, as you put it."

"Remarkable, then."

"No, nor remarkable. An' didn't want to be.

He was just an officer and a gentleman, straight as a die and modest as a maid, and we didn't wish for a better."

Dr. Hervey filled his pipe gravely. Dr. Hervey's degree, by the way, had nothing to do with medicine. There are men who seek out-of-the-way spots, such as the Islands, to hide their broken lives, and Dr. Hervey was one. He had been a Professor of Theology at a great Catholic University, noted there for his learning and his caustic tongue. His outspokenness had made him enemies, and these (not without excuse) had arraigned a book of his, accusing it of "Modernism." It had ended—since he was obstinate and would neither explain nor retract—in his being expelled from his chair and laid under excommunication. The expulsion would have done him no irremediable harm, since he possessed a competence, and moreover had made a name to command attention for whatever he chose to write. But the excommunication crushed him; for, like many a brusque man, he was sensitive, and like many a fatally driven enquirer, he had a deeper love of the Church and sense of her majesty than have ninety-nine in a hundred who pay her the service of lip and knee. He and his God alone knew what a comfort during the first bitterness of exile it had been to associate with the Commandant, so simple a gentleman, if withal somewhat slow-witted, a holy and

humble man of heart, so true at the root, so patient of his own disappointed life, so helpful of other men.

"You didn't wish for a better while you had the best," said Dr. Hervey, lighting his pipe very deliberately.

Jan watched the puffs of tobacco smoke. He owed his life to the man they were discussing, and he could only suppose that they must owe him a grudge for it in return. Sergeant Archelaus, indeed—whose temper did not improve with age—had more than once hinted that, though doubtless Providence had ordained this exchange of two lives, he for his part could not approve it.

"I don't want to speak irreverent, sir, but seemin' to me th' Almighty must get a twinge, lookin' down 'pon this plat o' turf. *Everywhere*—Look ye, here the good gentleman carves it out, accusin' nobody, writin' down no more'n his deserts; and him to spend his life in this God-forsaken hole which is next to Nowhere, and end by losin' it for a child from Nowhere at all."

"That is no way to talk," said Dr. Hervey sternly, after a glance at the boy, who, gazing out over the sea, seemed not to hear.

"A man must speak his thoughts, Doctor."

"It depends how and when he speaks 'em." If Dr. Hervey, in his own career, had always remembered this! "But what does *Everywhere* mean to

the best of us finite men? Your John Wesley said, 'All the world is my parish,' and a man as wise might answer, 'Then my parish is all the world.'"

"Good mornin', all!" interrupted a voice.

The new-comer was P.C. Epaminondas Ward (locally 'Paminondas), sole policeman of the Islands, sexton, too, of St. Lide's, town-crier, bill-poster and public official in general of Garland Town. "Good mornin', sir!" He touched his helmet to Dr. Hervey. "You'll excuse my breakin' in on your talk?"

"Certainly."

"It's a thing I hate to do. There's nothing like a good talk, and a man gets so few opportunities in the Force." Constable 'Paminondas was notoriously the first gossip in Garland Town. "But what might you ha' been discussin', making so bold?"

"Nothing against Her Majesty's peace, Constable, I assure you," answered Dr. Hervey gravely. "In point of fact, we were exercised over the difference between Everywhere and Nowhere, and I was trying to persuade Sergeant Archelaus that 'here' is 'everywhere' to a sensible man."

"That's true enough if you take ME," agreed 'Paminondas, adding modestly, "But perhaps you'll say that I'm an exception?"

Dr. Hervey muttered something polite.

"I'm a thoughtful man, as by nature, sir," went

on the Constable, " and you'd be astonished what thoughts occur to me by night, when I goes poking around and all the rest o' the world laid asleep. F'r instance, I climb to the top o' the hill here, and 'tis midnight as you might say, in a manner of speakin'. Midnight it is, and all around the Islands the great sea-lights shinin'—fixed white low down on the Monk, white revolvin' on St. Ann's, North Island winkin' like a great red eye, white flashes from the Stones, red-white-red-white from the Wolf, not to mention the Longships an' the south-east sky runnin' in flickers from the Lizard, like men shaking a double whip. 'There you go, all of ye,' I tells myself, 'warning mankind that here be the Islands. And what be the Islands,' says I, 'at the moment to all intents an' purposes but ME, 'Pami-nondas Ward, with a bull's-eye at my navvle more or less—— ?' "

" There, Archelaus ! " Dr. Hervey turned in triumph : but Sergeant Archelaus, after first spitting wide, had resumed his turf-trimming.

" Now, maybe you're wondering what brings me here ? " suggested the Constable. Meeting with no response, he continued, " Well, I don't mind telling you. It concerns the boy John Smith, in the form of a letter from her Ladyship. Her Ladyship sends word that Young Matthey Hender, on Brefar, wants an extry hand this fine season for the daffodil pickin',

and John Smith is to go. I've just informed the Treachers."

"Ho?" Sergeant Archelaus paused again and looked up. "What did Treacher say?"

"He made a communication to me—" began 'Paminondas in his best Petty Sessions manner.

"D——d your eyes, I shouldn' wonder?"

It should be mentioned here that the attitude of the garrison towards the civil government was traditionally hostile.

"In a general way," said Constable 'Paminondas magnanimously, "a man may d——n my eyes or he may not, as the case may be, and I takes it from whence it comes. The Force, in a manner of speakin', is accustomed to such misrepresentation, and impervious, if I make myself clear. But as touching her Ladyship's order Treacher saw 'twas no use kickin' against the pricks, an' behaved himself conformably, as you might put it *in toto*. Which the upshot is, as between you and me, that John Smith is to be sailed over to Brefar to-morrow afternoon at 4 p.m., and start pickin' daffodils."

"Well, lad, that puts an end to Latin for a time," said Dr. Hervey, stopping down the tobacco in his pipe with a useful forefinger.

The boy did not answer; could not for the moment return his look. It would have been ungrateful to confess the truth, that he longed to escape and take

his place among the children as one of them. Here, on St. Lide's, he mingled with the children in school, but always as one set mysteriously apart. He adored the sight of them, but could make no friends ; and the mere fact that he adored and saw them as so many bright angels playing leap-frog or marbles in the streets was proof that he could never be one of them. As counted by years their ages and his might be the same ; in fact he saw them through older, different eyes, yet yearned all the while to join them. In Brefar, picking daffodils, there might be children to understand him better. Brefar, at all events, lay clear out towards the circumference of the circle hemming him in.

The Star Castle, where he lodged with the Treachers, was a queer little octagonal building, set close within a circumvallation shaped like an eight-pointed star. A platform, seven feet high, ran round the interior of this circumvallation at about half its height of sixteen feet, and since the dwelling-house, twenty-one feet in height, was separated all round from the platform by a miserable fosse no more than four feet wide, it follows that the lower rooms lay in perpetual gloom, and only the attic chambers peeped over the battlements across the sea. Still, and although its eaves were low, from his bedroom window the boy could watch the great sea lights flashing or occulting—protecting, enclosing him in a

magic circle he longed to pierce. He had come from Nowhere, and Nowhere lay somewhere beyond.

He had a few very vague notions about God. The teacher down at the school said something about God every morning before marking the register, and the children regularly sang a hymn.

On the whole he felt pretty safe about God. But "O God, who am I?" was the child's last thought before he dropped off in a healthy sleep. Towards dawn he stirred in a dream uncomfortably, raised himself on an elbow, turned his pillow, damp with tears, and snuggled down to sleep again.

CHAPTER III.

CHY-AN-CHY FARM.

It was a voyage of delight ; better—yes, far better than all his expectations.

Sergeant Treacher, though of late years he seldom went on the sea, could handle a boat—as the Islanders allowed—" tidy well for a soldier-man," having been the Commandant's mate on many a fishing expedition. He knew all the rocks and shoals, which everywhere among the Islands crop up in the most unexpected places.

The boat sped along, close hauled to a brisk nor'-westerly breeze, across the roadstead, past the length of Saaron Island, and through the entrance of Cromwell's Sound, between Iniscaw and Brefar. Jan, perched up to windward on an old military chest which contained his few shirts and change of clothes (it bore the inscription " *R.A.* 1959*B*, *Depot* 19. *Return to Store,*" in white letters upon lead colour), drank in pure joy with the rush of air on his face.

At the mouth of the Sound the wind fell light and

headed them for a minute or two. The sail shook this side and that, and he had to duck his head to avoid the boom.

"Slip over to leeward here," said the Sergeant as the boat lost way. "Peek your head over-side, an' maybe I'll show ye something."

Jan obeyed, and peeping over, was surprised to see a rocky ledge close below him. The weed on it floated within a foot or so of the surface.

"Now, watch!" commanded the Sergeant.

Picking up a boat-hook, he jabbed the point of it smartly down amidst the weed. At once a long dark form shot out, darted away with quick gliding motion and was lost, Jan could not tell whither.

"See anything?"

"I—I saw a snake."

Sergeant Treacher chuckled.

"'Snake,' says the child. What do you know about snakes?"

"Nothing," Jan had to confess. He had never to his knowledge seen one before, or even the picture of one, for there were no picture books in the Star Castle. Yet he felt sure that this had been a snake.

"'Snake!' That's a good 'un, too!" chuckled Sergeant Treacher again, and fell silent, being a taciturn man by habit.

Jan lifted his head to ask, "What was the animal if not a snake? Couldn't snakes live in the sea?"

when his eyes fell on a vision which hitherto the boat's sail had concealed from him ; the beautiful shore of Iniscaw, with the Abbey towers rising over a mass of rhododendrons, and backed by tall spires of evergreen trees ; and below the Abbey an inland lake where a whole herd of fawn-coloured cattle stood knee-deep, some gazing at the boat, others dipping their black muzzles to drink.

He had passed into Wonderland, and the spell was still on him as they sailed up by Brefar shore, close under whole fields of daffodils, golden in the Island's shadow—small fields fenced around with dwarf hedges of escallonia and veronica. But the flowers had leapt these fences, it would seem ; for colonies of them straggled along the edge of the cliffs and poured down to the very beaches—these being bulbs discarded by the farmers at sorting time and "heaved to cliff" to take their own chances.

They brought the boat ashore upon a beach where Farmer Hender—"Young Matthey"—stood awaiting them. He had a grave, not unkindly face, and was clad in earth-stained blue ; but what impressed the child most was his hat—a top hat of rusty black silk, extraordinarily high in the crown. Later Jan learned that this hat passed from father to son, and was worn as a crown of authority by the reigning head of Chy-an-Chy Farm.

The farmer took charge of Jan, and shouldering

his box—for, as he explained, to-morrow was "steamer day," and no hands could be spared from the flower-picking—led the way up a shelving coombe to the farmstead, a grey building or cluster of buildings fenced with tamarisks, and set about with numerous glass-houses. The windows of these houses were banked high with flowers, but over this screen Jan, as he passed, caught sight of a number of girls at work, bunching and tying the blooms. The door of the house porch stood wide, and he followed the farmer straight into the kitchen, where Mrs. Hender and a short middle-aged servant were engaged in setting out tea for the workers.

The kitchen was large, and had an immense open fireplace, with kettles hanging upon long hooks, and crocks mounted on brandises. A table, twenty feet or so in length, stood close against the long window seat. From a bacon-rack fixed under the beams of the ceiling hung hams and sides of bacon wrapped in dry bracken and paper, with strings and bags of parched herbs—horehound, elder, mugwort, —specifics against various family ailments. The chimney-piece was flanked on the right by a dresser, on the left by a dark settle ; and on the settle sat two very old men and an old woman, who regarded the boy—all three—with scarce so much movement as the blink of an eyelid, save that the old woman's head nodded quickly, regularly, as though by clock-

work. These old people gave him a scare, and for a while he found it hard to believe them alive.

The middle-aged servant—who had a large, good-natured face, and in shape resembled a full sack tied tightly about the middle—came bustling forward and offered to lend the "maister" a hand to carry the box upstairs.

"Aye, do," said the mistress. "If it takes ye away from breakin' cream-jugs, it'll be time well spent. . . . Mary Martha broke another cream-jug only five minutes ago, if you'll believe me."

"That's true," sighed Mary Martha, still broadly beaming. "I do seem to be very unfortunate in cream-jugs."

"Not to mention the four cups an' saucers you scat to atoms on their way to the Wesleyan tea."

"I am very unfortunate in cups an' saucers," wailed Mary Martha.

"Nor the cream-pan, last Wednesday week."

"Oh, don't mention it, missis! I can't bear no more!"

"And now," persisted Mrs. Hender, addressing Jan, "it's candlesticks. Last Sunday a china one —one of a pair that I bought at Penzance, and the dealer said they were exact copies of the pillars in Solomon's temple; an' I mended that. But what was the use? Yesterday she lets fall the fellow to 'en——"

"I do seem to be very unfortunate in candlesticks." Mary Martha's tone of despair and her jolly smile together fairly upset the boy.

"And in 'most everything else," snapped Mrs. Hender.

"You wouldn' think," she said next minute, as Jan's box went bumping up the stairs, Mary Martha knocking her end of it against the balusters, the wall, the edges of the treads,—"you'd never think that woman had put up a twenty-pound tombstone over her late husband—now would you?"

It did seem astonishing; and so Jan agreed, still with a nervous glance at the old folks on the settle, whose faces continued impassive, as though they neither heard nor saw.

Five minutes later the work-people from the glass-houses came trooping in to tea. They crowded round the long table and upon forms by the hearth, where the men sat with mugs balanced on one knee and on the other a thick slice of bread and butter or a hunk of saffron cake. Jan tried to count. The company numbered thirty-six or thirty-seven; he could not be sure, for he had been told to squeeze himself among the young people on the window seat, and their chatter made counting difficult.

On his right sat a child of about his own age, who told him that her name was Annet, and that she

had two sisters and a brother. She pointed them out. The sisters were called Linnet and Bennet; the brother she explained "just had to be Mark."

Jan asked why; for a study of the boy's face, which was dark of complexion and somewhat heavy, gave him no clue. Annet indicated the old people, who had been led forward from the settle and placed at the head of the board, where they sat chewing slowly like ruminant animals. *That's* great-gran'-father Matthey; he's Old Matthey, and ninety-four last birthday. And *that's* Un' Matthey, Old Matthey's son—and my gran'father, of course—with Aun' Deb next to him. She's his wife, an' father's mother. Father is Young Matthey. That big man down at the bottom of the table is father's eldest; we call him Little Matthey. He was married two years back, and Sister Liza—we call Little Matthey's wife Sister Liza—is upstairs putting the baby to bed, and we call *him* Matthey's Matthey.

Jan agreed with her that for one family this was plenty of Mattheys, and that a Mark among them was a change at all events.

"It must feel funny," said Annet, "to be like you, and have no father nor mother nor any belongings."

Jan looked at her quickly, uneasily. But she was serious, it seemed, and did not mean to tease him.

At once—how do children learn these ways?—he began to put on airs and to look darkly romantic.

"Don't!" he protested, sinking his voice to a confidential whisper. The success of it surprised him. As a matter of fact, he had never felt any deep yearning over his unknown parents, though his yearning for an answer to the questions, "*Who am I?*" "*From where in the world do I come?*" was persistent, often poignant, sometimes keeping him awake in a horror of emptiness, of belonging to nowhere . . . But this, the first romantic adventure of his life, made his head swim, and he played up to it by being false.

Annet—she was a dark pretty girl with really beautiful eyelashes—found him "interesting," and carried him off after tea to the glass-houses, now lit with oil lamps, where she taught him the simple mysteries of "bunching"—setting up blooms in pyramidical bunches, a dozen to the bunch, with room for each perianth to expand; for the flowers are picked in bud while it is possible, kept in water under glass until partly open, and so packed; the wise grower timing them to reach the market just at the moment of their perfection. Moreover, he thus avoids the worst risk of the February storms that sweep in from the Atlantic, charged with brine, spotting the open blooms and rendering them unsaleable.

Annet told the boy all this, and much else concerning the daffodils, while her small hands worked away with eleven other pairs of hands, bunching and tying. At the far end of the glass-house three grown girls were packing away the bunches in shallow boxes of various sizes—three, five, or six dozen to the box—and at the head of the table where they worked stood a young man receiving the full boxes, nailing down their covers, and affixing the labels. Twice, as Jan sat and watched, Mary Martha came bustling in with a kettle, for the water in which the flowers stood before being packed must be kept tepid—this was one of the secrets of young Farmer Matthey's success as a marketer. And whenever the door of the glass-house opened, the boy heard the tap-tap of a hammer across the yard from an outbuilding where new boxes were being fashioned and nailed together.

"You may try your hand, if you will," said Annet graciously. "Here is a pair of scissors. To-morrow, though, father'll set you to work on the pickin'—that's the boys' work. And while you are trying you might tell me a story."

"A story?" Jan echoed blankly. "But I don't know any."

"*Everyone* must know some kind of story," said Annet with firmness. "Once upon a time there was a King and a Queen, and they were very sorry

because they had no children. That's how you begin."

"But I don't see how it goes on, if they had no children—unless they go on being sorry."

"Silly! Of course they get a child in the end, and that's what the story's about. Now you go on from there."

"Oh!" said Jan, and began desperately—"Once upon a time there was a King and a Queen, and they were very sorry because they had no children; but of course they got a child in the end. He—came to them—in a boat——"

Annet nodded.

"That's better."

"He came to them in a boat," repeated Jan. "On the way he looked over the boat, and far down in the sea he saw a snake swimming."

"Now you're *inventing*," said Annet. "Well, never mind! One mustn't believe all one hears."

"But I saw one to-day," Jan protested.

"Go along with you—a snake, swimming in the sea! Well, let's hear what the snake said."

"He didn't say anything. Sergeant Treacher pushed a boathook down among the seaweed——"

"Who's Sergeant Treacher?"

"He—he's called Treacher, and he's a sergeant. He lives upon Garrison Hill on St. Lide's, along with Mrs. Treacher, and looks after the Castle."

"How does he come into the story?"

"I don't know that he comes into the story at all; at least, not exactly," Jan confessed.

"I'm tired of hearing about Sergeant Treacher," said Annet; "and I don't call it telling a story when you leave me to do all the talking. But I must say," she added kindly, "you've made up that bunch very nicely, if it's your first try. Who taught you to make that pretty knot?"

"Sergeant Treacher," the boy began; but at this point luckily someone called out from the far end of the glass-house that the boxes were all finished. Fresh boxes would be ready after supper, when the elder women would start packing again, while the children went off to bed. So they trooped back to the kitchen.

At supper Annet could not help being mischievous. She told the children near that Jan on his way to Brefar had seen a snake in the sea; whereat he blushed furiously, which set the girls giggling, while an ugly tow-headed boy across the table burst into a guffaw, showing the gaps in his teeth.

Mrs. Hender, hearing the mirth, glanced down the board.

"What's amiss down there?" she asked. "Annet, Annet, you're not teasing the child, I hope?"

"He says he's seen a snake, missus," called out the tow-headed boy.

"Lor' mercy! Where?"

"In the sea here, off Brefar," with another guffaw. "Brought up 'pon St. Lide's, an' not to know a conger!"

"Aw, a conger, was it?" said Mrs. Hender. "Yes, now, I dersay 'twas a conger he saw. They're very like, now you come to mention it," she added, seeing poor Jan's confusion.

He could not understand the laughter, but it overwhelmed him with shame and vexation so that he wished he could slip beneath the table, and lower, till the earth covered him.

"There's snakes on the Main, now; real adders and vipers; an' that's one reason why I never could bring myself to live in those parts. The thought came over me only last time I was over to Penzance. Half-way up Market Jew Street it came over me with a rush, and there and then a funny feelin' all round the bottom of my skirt, till I heard a rude man askin' what was the price of calves 'pon the Islands."

"There was a Snake over here once upon a time —over here 'pon the Islands," broke in a high, quavering voice.

It proceeded from the old man, Un' Matthey, and he spoke up as if a spring had been started somewhere within him.

Mrs. Hender rapped the table with the back of a fork.

"Hush 'ee, all, now, if you please! Un' Matthey wants to tell a story."

Conticuere omnes, intentique ora tenebant.

CHAPTER IV.

UN' MATTHEY'S STORY.

"THERE was a Snake over 'pon St. Lide's, one time," said the old man, still in his high quaver, staring straight across the table; and Aun' Deb, his old wife, kept nodding her head beside him as if confirming the tale from the start.

"—The Snake lived in the middle of the Island, in Holy Vale, and there he lorded it free an' easy till St. Lide came along and shut him up in a bag, out o' harm's way. After a time St. Lide took an' went the way of all flesh, forgetting all about the Snake an' the bag, that he'd left hangin' from the branch of an apple tree.

"In those days St. Lide's was a proper wilderness. All the folks that counted—kings and queens an' such-like—lived over this side, 'pon Brefar here and Saaron."

"Hear him!" put in Mrs. Hender. "An' Saaron nowadays but a land o' desolation! Well did the Psalmist say, 'What ups an' downs in the world there be!'"

"One day, hundreds o' years after, a Saaron went over to St. Lide's to shoot rabbits. He came on the bag hangin' from the tree, an' saw the inside of it movin'. 'Hullo!' says he, 'some careless fellow has left a bag o' ferrets behind him. This 'll come in very handy.' He whips out his knife, cuts open the neck o' the bag, an' forth jumps a mons'rous big Snake, an' winds itself about his neck ready to strangle him. 'Hullo!' says the Saaron man, 'thee wou's'n't kill me, I hope?' 'Why not?' said the Snake. 'Why, seemin' to me, you owe me your liberty, not to say your life.' 'That 's true enough,' says the Snake. 'A wise man shut me up in that there bag, where for these hundreds o' years I've been perishin' of hunger.' 'Then how in the world could you be so ongrateful as for to kill me?' says the Man from Saaron. 'Well, that's a pretty tale, I must say,' answers the Snake. 'Hungry I am, and ongrateful I own myself; but for ongratefulness where's the like of man?' 'Let some judge decide atween us,' says the Man from Saaron.

"The Snake consented, an' they set off together to hunt up a judge. The first they met was a Tree, an' they stated their quarrel. 'Now, O Tree, judge atween us,' says the Man. Says the Tree, 'No trouble about that. In the summers I let man cool himself an' his flocks under my branches, but

soon as winter comes he cuts the same down for fuel. Nothing in the world so ongrateful as man. Take an' throttle en,' says the Tree.

"The Man from Saaron cried out for another judge. 'Very well,' the Snake agreed, an' they came to Sheep. 'You Sheep, decide atween us.' 'No trouble at all,' says the Sheep. 'I gave that man my fleece to cover his back. In return he robbed my lambs from me, and to-morrow he'll turn me over to the slaughterer. Throttle en,' says the Sheep.

"But the Man from Saaron cried out for a fairer judge. They came to a Spring. She fairly choked when they put her the question. 'I've a hundred daughters,' she said, 'that in pure good natur' turned this fellow's mills, washed his flocks, an' laid bare their ore for him along the bank. In return he defiled them. Throttle en, I say, an' quick!'

"Still the Man cried for another judge. They came to a Rabbit, an' stated the cause. The Rabbit said to hisself, 'Here's a ticklish business, judgin' atween a Man and a Snake,' and rubbed his nose for a bit to gain time. 'You've come to a mean critter, an' poor of understandin',' says he after a while. 'Would you mind settin' out the quarrel from the start?' 'Well, to begin with,' says the Snake, 'the Man found me in this here bag.' 'Oh, but you'll excuse me,' says the Rabbit, looking

sideways for fear to meet the Snake's eye, 'in that tiny bag, did you say?' 'I'm not accustomed to have my word doubted by rabbits,' says the Snake, 'but I'll forbear a bit yet, and give ye the proof.' He coiled himself back into the bag. The Rabbit wasn't sayin' anythin', but his eyelids went flickety-flink, an' the Man from Saaron didn' miss the hint! He sprang fore 'pon the bag an' closed the neck o' it with a twist!"

Here the old man struck his hands together and looked round on his audience with a knowing smile of triumph. His face for the moment had grown animated.

The company, too, clapped their hands as they laughed.

"Bravo, Un' Matthey!" they cried.

As Annet applauded, Jan plucked her by the sleeve.

"But that's not the end of the story," he objected.

"Eh?"

"There's more to come—more about the Rabbit——"

"A lot you know about stories! Why, not an hour ago——"

"What's the child saying?" asked her mother, who had taken the opportunity to step down to where the children sat, and was making forward for an empty centre-dish to replenish it with thick bread and butter.

"He says Un' Matthey hasn't finished yet."

"Well, and that's true enough," said Mrs. Hender, who had heard the story many times. "But how came you so wise, little man?"

Jan could not tell. He had a queer sense—it had been haunting him ever since he landed and the farmer shouldered his box—that everything happening had happened to him before, somewhere, at some time. This was impossible, of course; but with Annet especially he had once or twice forestalled the very words she would say next, and then, as she said them, the trick of her voice, some movement of the hands, some turn in the poise of her head, came back as parts of a half-remembered lesson. In just the same way scraps of Un' Matthey's story had come back as it might be out of some dream the boy had dreamed and forgotten.

But meanwhile Un' Matthey had resumed:—

"The Man from Saaron went home-along, an' the Rabbit sat by his hole an' smiled to hisself, thinkin' how clever he'd been. He was still smilin' there next day, when he looks up an' sees the Man comin' back, an' with a bag in his hand—either the same bag or another. . . .

"'Hullo!' thinks the Rabbit, 'he's bringin' me a gift for my wise judgment. Well, I deserve one. But,' says he, 'gratitude has a knack o' shrinkin',' for he saw that whatever the bag held 'twas of no

great size. The Man gripped it half-way down. The Man came close.

"'Good mornin',' says he. 'Yesterday I was in too much of a hurry to stay an' thank you. A second Solomon you be, an' no mistake.'

"'In justice, as in other things, a body can but do his best,' answers the Rabbit, modest-like.

"'You deserve a reward, anyway,' says the Man.

"'Justice is blind, my lord,' says the Rabbit, edgin' up towards the bag.

"The Man opened it; out jumped a ferret, and *clk!*"—here Un' Matthey made a sudden uncanny noise in his throat—"in two twos Master Rabbit lay stretched out dead as a doornail. The Man from Saaron kicked the ferret away off the body.

"'He's very properly punished!' said the Man from Saaron. 'Justice ought to be without fear or favour, an' his wasn't neither. But he'll make very good eatin'."

Un' Matthey had scarcely finished and been applauded when Young Matthey called for prayers. The farmer had pulled out his watch once or twice during the story, for in the daffodil season business is business. He himself read a chapter from the Bible—to-night it was the story of the Shunammite's son—and afterwards put up an extempore prayer when the family had dropped on their knees—all but the three old people, who sat in a row and sat

with hands spread palm down on to the board, thumb touching thumb, much as children play the game of " Up Jenkins ! "

The young folks on the window-seat slipped down and knelt with their faces to it. This, of course, brought Jan's small legs calves upward well hidden under the table, and of a sudden, midway in the prayer, a sharp pinch almost made him cry aloud with pain. This was a trick played on him by the tow-headed boy, who had dodged beneath the form on the opposite side, and as he pinched uttered a derisive hiss, meant to resemble a snake's ; but the trick was by no means a success, for the hiss itself ended in a squeak as a hand reached out after the joker, caught him by the ankle, and twisted it with a sharp wrench.

The farmer's prayer, after invoking God's blessing on the household in general, went on to ask a number of things in particular. It entreated : " That Thy loving care may go with the steamer to-morrow and prosper her," whereupon all answered " Amen." It glanced at Mary Martha : " That it may please Thee to lighten the burden of one in our midst lately afflicted with breakages." Jan himself was not let off : " And that Thy mercy may be tender upon a newcomer, a child to-day brought to the circle of these Thy servants." It took the farmer's fields in their order, particularising their crops

(whether *Emperors, M. J. Berkeley's* or *Ornatuses*), and separately asking favours for each. In short, it was just such a prayer as that of the Athenians, commanded by Marcus Aurelius: "*Rain, rain, dear Zeus, down on the ploughed fields of the Athenians and on the plains.*" "In truth (says the Emperor) we ought not to pray at all, or to pray in this direct and noble fashion."

On its conclusion the farmer, rising from his knees with the rest, looked down along the board sternly with a masterful eye, and demanded to know "Who it was just now makin' light of our supplications under the table?" There was a constrained silence—Young Farmer Matthey, not a doubt of it, was master in his own household—until the tow-headed boy stood up, yellow with fright, looking as though he desired the earth to open at his feet and cover him. At the same moment a dark, good-looking lad seated beside him—a boy probably two years his senior—glanced across at Jan with a smile.

"Billing's boy, is it?" said Young Matthey sternly. "Then you, Billing's boy, will step over yonder and stand with your face to the corner while the others pass out."

The others passed out there and then—the elders to the glass-houses to finish the packing, the youngsters to bed.

To Jan was assigned a small attic chamber, barely furnished, clean as a pin, smelling potently of onions that had been kept to dry the winter through on its naked floor. From its windows, between the eaves, he looked straight out upon the red sea-light on North Island, and just within the edge of the frame, as he lay down in his bed, the far Stones Lightship repeated its quick three flashes of white.

They were the same lights he had watched from his garret window on St. Lide's; but they were nearer, and it seemed to him that he was nearer the edge of the spell. He dropped asleep. At intervals in his dreams he saw the face of the dark, good-looking boy smiling at him across the table, while still through his dreams, until midnight and after, sounded the tap-tap of a hammer from the outhouse, nailing boxes for the daffodils.

CHAPTER V.

TOM TIDDLER'S GROUND.

"Here we are on Tom Tiddler's ground
Picking up gold and silver;
Daisies and lilies
And daffadownlilies—
O, who wouldn't be a delver!"

NEXT morning the farmer took him out to the fields, having first provided him with a pair of small leggings, for some rain had fallen during the night, and wading among the flowers would be wet work.

They came to a strip of ground, in size about an acre, set about with a low hedge of veronica and ablaze with yellow trumpet daffodils—yes, ablaze, though most of the buds were but half open. Half a dozen boys were already at work here, headed (to Jan's delight) by the brown, smiling boy; for most of the men of the farm had started before daybreak to row Young Matthey's barge, laden with flower-boxes, down to the landing on the south point of Iniscaw, where the Lady's launch would take them in tow across the Sound to St. Lide's Pier, under the lee of which the steamer lay.

The farmer, having briefly instructed Jan what flowers to choose, how to pluck them low down by the base with a sharp snap, and how to basket them when plucked, assigned him his row and left him in charge of Dave, as he called the brown boy.

The field lay on the slope above the cliffs in a sheltered hollow, facing southward ; so that, over the sheets of daffodils and over the dwarf hedge, you saw the blue water of the archipelago, right away south to St. Lide's and to Garrison Hill with the Star Castle crowning it, and at its base (so clear was the morning) the smoke of the steamer as she lay getting up steam. The sunshine, falling warm on the wet flowers, drew from them the rarest fragrance. (They were trumpet daffodils, as has been said, and nine out of ten of us would have called them odourless ; but little Jan, it was to be discovered, had a sense of smell keen almost as a wild animal's.) The fragrance mingled with the wafted brine of the sea, and between them—what with the breeze and the myriad heads of gold it set nodding and the spirit of youth dancing inside of him—they flooded the child's soul with happiness—a happiness so poignant that once, straightening himself up in a pause of the picking, he felt his eyes brim with tears, through which the daffodils danced in a mist. Brushing the back of his hand across his eyes, he glanced shyly across at Dave, fearful lest Dave had detected his weakness.

And Dave had, but set it down to the wrong cause.

"Takes ye in the back, first-along, hey?" said Dave kindly. "Never mind, little 'un; within a week you'll get over the cramps, an' it's not bad ye're doin', for a beginner."

Jan blessed him for misunderstanding. What a splendid fellow Dave was—so brown and strong! But Dave, though he could smile most of his time, had very little mouth-speech, as they say on the Islands. He contented himself with showing Jan how to arrange his flowers in the "maund" or basket—they had one maund between them, and were working down two parallel rows—and he did it mostly by dumb show. Once, however, he called out, standing up and pointing—

"There she goes!"

—and all the boys paused for a minute and gazed southward at the steamer heading out from St. Lide's Quay for the Main. As he watched her, the old longing came upon Jan with a rush; the old question, as a sudden cloud upon his glee.

They fell to work again. But a few minutes later word arrived that Dave must attend the farmer in an upper field, where he had an ingenious device of forcing some rarer bulbs as they stood by covering them with small portable glass-houses mounted on wheels. This matured the plants better than the old

way of transferring them to boxes and forcing them in a large greenhouse; but the glass-frames needed handling, and the most of his grown men had not yet returned with the barge. So Dave was requisitioned.

He had no sooner left than the industry of the boys in the field sensibly slackened. Jan, bending over the row, did not perceive it, and was rudely awakened by a light cuff on the ear. Above him stood the tow-headed boy, grinning and showing the gaps in his teeth.

"Sneak!" said the tow-headed boy, "that's for telling tales on me last night."

A sudden fury leapt up in Jan. He wanted to kill the tow-headed boy—who was so ugly and told lies. Without waiting to consider, Jan leapt on him, and the attack was so sudden that both rolled over among the dripping daffodils, crushing the flowers as they rolled. For a few seconds Jan was on the top, and his hands felt for the tow-headed boy's throat, to grip it; but by-and-by age and weight prevailed.

"Little devil, I'll teach you!"

The tow-headed boy first clutched the nape of his neck and rubbed his face into the soil, then caught at one of the writhing arms and began to twist it.

"Now sing small, little devil!"

"I won't," gasped Jan, almost faint with pain. "You tell lies, and are ugly—ugly!"

"Hullo!"

It was Dave's voice, and Dave descended on the scrimmage like a young god. He cuffed the two apart; but Jan, white with passion, flew again at his adversary, and had to be caught by the jacket-neck and flung among the wet flowers.

"Little spitfire!" laughed Dave, after doing this gently but firmly. "Seemin' to me, Ben Lager, this field is'n safe for you, and you'd better come along an' help with the glass boxes. Farmer sent me down to fetch up another hand."

So the tow-headed boy was marched off, and Jan, picking himself up, fell to work again. He was trembling from head to foot. He had never in his short life known such a fit of rage, and it affected him like an ague. For a full hour the trembling lasted, at intervals broken by a sob that convulsed all his limbs.

The harvest had begun late this year, in contrast with last season's, when picking started before New Year's Day and went on steadily until May month. Up to the opening days of February Young Matthey had carried a gloomy face about his fields, consoling himself with market reports of unusually high prices (due to severe weather in the South of France, where the gardens of his trade rivals, the Mediterranean growers, had lain under snow for three weeks on end). Young Matthey ever spoke with asperity of these

distant Frenchmen, his mind confusing them in a queer fashion with what he had read in newspapers concerning Monte Carlo. He imagined them at the end of a season, when he banked his few hard-earned pounds, as flocking to the tables with large sums of money (that ought by rights to be in *his* pocket), and gambling it away upon *roulette*, a game happily unknown in the Islands. Indeed, the Islanders knew no games at all. Strange to say, even the children played none—until Jan taught them, as you shall hear.

In February the flowers awoke and came on with a rush. The previous summer had been a hot one, baking and ripening the bulbs in the ground; but with November had come a spell of cold, and an obstinate one, lasting through December and January and holding (as the farmer argued) the head of the procession in check while the later regiments of flowers pressed up and trod on their leaders' heels, all waiting the signal of fine weather; so that when the sunshine came all burst into bloom together, and bloomed riotously. The Islands had never known such a March. In the first week the workers had to give over saving the flowers in bud and bunching them in water jars under shelter, for they opened faster than the whole population could pick. The sky was clear; the weather-glass stood at "Set Fair." The maidens left their glass-houses and

worked afield with the lads. In the last week of the holidays the farmers met and sent a deputation to the Lady, protesting that if the schools re-opened as usual the flower industry would perish amid plenty.

"What was Government, with its Education Grant, compared with this hundreds of pounds' worth that must rot in the fields!" The Lady snapped her fingers at the Board of Education in London, and extended the holidays a fortnight. There was even talk of hiring another steamer to ply from the Main. The present one would carry but fifty tons at a time, for flower boxes take up much room for their weight. Fifty tons thrice a week—say seventy thousand flowers to the ton—between nine and ten millions of flowers!—which means a million and a half picked every day, since the Islanders do not work on Sundays.

So instead of a month Jan dwelt six weeks upon Brefar, until all the trumpet daffodils and the Leedsii were either picked or overblown, and even the Poet's Narcissus, latest of all—in those days little grown on the outer Islands, but chiefly under apple trees in the few orchards on St. Lide's and in the Lady's gardens at Iniscaw—were past their prime. They were happy days for the boy, but they were also days of almost constant labour, so that often after supper and prayers he would climb to his attic almost too weary to drag off his clothes—far too weary to loiter

at his window picking out and naming the sea-lights —before tumbling into bed and into a dreamless sleep.

On the last "steamer day" Young Matthey gave him leave to travel across with him to St. Lide's in the barge and prepare the Treachers for his return. As he stepped ashore on the quay he had a queer feeling of having been absent for years instead of for weeks. The steamer lay alongside, as he had seen her lie some scores of times; the carts were rattling down from the island; the laden boats hurrying across the Sound, from St. Ann's in the south, from St. Michael's in the north (where, local report said, the men grew tails and spoke an outlandish language). The boxes were being shipped at high pressure, some sliding down shoots into the hold, others overpiling an already monstrous deck cargo; and, as usual, the skipper was holding two altercations at once with shippers who had attempted to encroach beyond their allotted space. But it seemed to Jan that either he had grown or Garland Town had shrunk. He came back to it as one who had seen the world.

At the head of the street, where the rough path climbed to the Garrison gate, he ran against Dr. Hervey.

"Hullo, youngster! Well, it's fine and brown you are!" cried the Doctor genially. "And you've

shot up, I protest. Is it Brefar air, or has the world grown for ye? "

Jan, with a new air of independence, yet modestly enough, returned the Doctor's smile.

" It's different, sir."

" Aye, aye ! *Cœlum, non animum, mutant*—worse rubbish was never uttered. But, boy, ye've missed your Latin—precious days of it. We must make up leeway ; and from Latin, in a year's time or so, I'll lead ye to Greek, which is a baptism, look ye,—a baptism into a cult, and the only true key to freedom. There be other ways more alluring, that look easier, but if you'd be a free man—free of these Islands, free of the Main, free of the Mediterranean, which is the sea of seas, and of Rome, to which all the roads lead—ye'll avoid short cuts, and sit down with me again to *mensa, mensam, mensæ.*"

CHAPTER VI.

MARY MARTHA'S TOMBSTONE.

YOUNG Farmer Matthey having much business to transact in Garland Town, the return journey was not made until late in the afternoon. Half-way across, the farmer called Jan aft to speak with him.

"I'd a sudden thought to-day," he said, "and meeting Sergeant Treacher on the quay just now I broached it to him. You seem to be a quiet, steady boy, an' I hear good reports of 'ee, besides what I've seen with my own eyes. What d'ye say to livin' 'long with us at Chy-an-Chy, an' goin' to Brefar school along with my own childern? You needn't be in a hurry with 'yes' or 'no,'" he added, as Jan stood with face flushed and stammered for words. "Because, anyway, we'd have to get the Mistress's leave first. But I was thinkin' that I've a shortage of boys—maids in plenty, but no boys to mention, or none to be depended on. There's Little Matthey, my eldest. He's a grown man, an' the farm'll come to him in God's time, but he've no understandin' for flowers, an' never had. As for

Mark, his mother spoils 'en. Goin' outside my own, Dave is a good lad; but Dave, when he grows up, 'll go into service with Trinity House. His parents have settled 'pon that, and a very good lightkeeper he'll make. Lager's boy is no good at all, nor Aby Hicks, nor his small brother Sam, nor Seth Piper. What I want is a lad pretty bright at learnin'— What's that in your hand?" he asked, breaking off.

Jan opened the parcel—a scrap of old newspaper. It enwrapped a flat-cupped narcissus, with a belt of earth about the bulb.

"Hullo! That's what they call carryin' coals to Newcastle, eh? Ha'nt we Ornatuses enough on Brefar, these days?"

"It grows up at the Castle, sir, in the ditch between the house and the outside wall, but near by the door where the sun gets to it. And the red in the cup is quite different to any on Brefar. I was carrying it home to—to show to——"

"So it is, now you mention it," said the farmer, examining the flower and not noting Jan's confusion. He handed it back. "Some freak, I shouldn't wonder. . . . But that only proves what I was sayin'. You've a quickness for flowers, a naptitood; and I was reckonin', maybe, if I brought ye up an' gave ye board an' keep, one o' these days you'd reward me by turnin' out a pretty useful apprentice, an'

then who knows but ye won't finish up as a hind ?—at sixteen shillin' a week an' your meals ! "

But this part of the alluring prospect did not touch Jan, who had never possessed any money and knew nothing of its value.

" Please, sir, what did Sergeant Treacher say ? " he ventured.

" Oh, the Treachers are ready enough ! It's for your good, and," added the farmer not very lucidly, " 'tisn' as if you was their own flesh an' blood."

The barge was brought ashore at the little beach where Jan had made his first landing on Brefar. The children, their harvest work over, were all gathered there to welcome it, and Mary Martha, as the custom was at the end of harvest, had brought them down a picnic tea from the farm, and had already smashed two cups. The kettle sang on a fire under the cliff's shadow. All around the head of the cove grew clumps of narcissus poeticus—cast-away flowers, unmarketable, the most of them by this time overblown, but beautiful yet—beautiful as white ghosts when the shadows crept down the beach and covered them ; for some blossomed even among the stones at the water's edge, and would bloom again next year unless meanwhile an abnormally high tide came and washed the bulbs away. Jan joined the tea-drinkers, his heart swelling with his news. Thanks to Mary Martha's affliction (as

she had come to call it) there was no cup for him, and he was told to go shares in Annet's, taking sip and sip with her—the bliss !

But the bliss did not endure.

" What's that you've brought me ? " asked Annet, nodding towards the parcel, which he had laid beside him.

" How did you know I brought it for you ? " he asked, his heart beating.

She pouted.

" Is it for Linnet, then, or for Bennet ? "

" But it *is* for you ! "

He unwrapped it, and held it out. Her pretty face darkened.

" Is it mocking me ? A silly old Ornatus ! "

" But it's *different,*" he began stupidly, afraid of the wrath in her voice.

" As if you didn' know that I am sick of flowers—yes, sick of them ! "

She tossed the bulb away pettishly, and sat staring before her, with tears in her eyes. The heel of her boot ground a pebble or two in the sand. Poor Jan looked at her ruefully. He had meant to give her pleasure, and a moment ago his own happiness had been brimming. The news he had to tell, news so good for him—Would that, too, make her angry ?

But at this point Mary Martha let fall a plate, and upon the crash of it uplifted her voice in a wail.

" An' now it's plates ! Oh, my misguided hands ! Plates an' cups an' candlesticks will ever be my cross ; and no hopes for it, maister, till we meet in the land o' marrow an' fatness, where there's no candle an' the crockery tumbles light."

" Never mind a plate, Mary Martha, up or down," said the farmer genially.

He had done satisfactory business that morning with the bank at Garland Town, and could afford the loss of a plate or two at harvest-ending.

To cheat her remorse he suggested that since she was talking of crosses she might tell them about the one she had put up to her deceased husband.

" 'Tis a story that never fails to cheer," he assured the company tactfully.

" It cost the all of twenty pounds," began Mary Martha, cheering up at once. " I got Hugh and Co.'s receipt for the money here in my purse, an' ne'er will I part with it."

She opened the purse and showed the paper, greasy with much folding and unfolding.

" But don't 'ee go callin' it a Cross, maister, when 'tis a Collum."

" Dear me, so 'tis." The farmer took her correction. " Iss, iss, a collum, an' I beg your pardon, woman."

" A broken collum, an' polished granite, with the

ivy growin' round it nat'ral as life. Not real ivy, you'll understand, but granite too, same as the collum. . . . When my poor dear man went off in a decline an' died—an' a kinder man the Lord never put heart into—I went to Hugh and Co. an' told him I wanted a tombstone. Hugh and Co. is the tombstone-maker over to Garland Town; his real name is William Hugh, an' I never saw any Co. about him. I told Hugh and Co. I wanted to be measured for a stone, if he'd understand, because all my savin's had gone in the funeral, an' I wouldn' have the stone until I'd paid for it, every penny—let alone that the dear man never could abide debt in his lifetime, an' 'd ne'er have rested easy wi' that weight o' credit 'pon his remains. Hugh and Co. was very nice about it, an' accommodatin'; offered to put up one for me on a sort of hire system, an' made a lot o' useful suggestions. But I stuck out that I'd have no stone till he had his money; only I wanted to choose the thing aforehand so's to have a notion o' what I'd be savin' for. Seein' how firm I was about the payment, he took me into his yard—such a place, my dears! Tombstones by the scores, with 'Sacred to the Mem'ry' ready carved 'pon 'em, and then a blank, waitin' till the person died, so that you got the creeps wonderin' if it mightn' be your turn next. But *I* didn't get no creeps, not carin' just then how soon I was taken.

Hugh and Co. showed me all kinds o' patterns. Bein' used to his trade, he was as easy about it as a butcher with a calf, an' yet very kind all the time. He wanted to know if I'd have it in Delabole Slate or in a kind o' what he called Compo, that he praised up for standin' all weathers. 'We've a cheap line in boards, too,' says he, 'all seasoned wood, with two coats o' best paint besides primin', an' the whole concern to be repainted, often as you like, at contrack prices.' But I was looking at something quite different that had caught my eye, standin' in the middle o' the yard. 'That there pillar would be my fancy,' says I, 'if only 'tweren't broken. How did you meet with such a naccydent?' 'Broken?' says he. 'That's done a-purpose, to show the life underneath was a-snapped off afore its time.' When I come to look closer I saw he was tellin' the truth. 'Just like my poor dear!' says I, an' asks en the price. He seemed a bit absent-minded of a sudden. 'Oh, that there collum's a masterpiece,' he says, 'done by one of our best workmen on the Main! 'Twas meant for a deceased party whose name I won't mention, bein' actionable, perhaps; but the relatives quarrelled over the will, an' here the blessed thing is, back 'pon my hands. I can't tell you the whole story, missus,' says Hugh and Co., 'but here it be, through an act o' carelessness in the foreman who took the order, an' I've stuck it up here to show

what we can do when we try.' 'How much might it be, sir?' I asks, my heart in my mouth. 'Well,' says he, 'if you should know anyone who happens to be in want of such a thing, you can tell 'em that, misfit tho' 'tis, I can't let it go under twenty pound.' I stood there of a sudden all of a tremble. 'I'll take it,' says I, hardly believing the sound o' my own voice. 'What!' says he. 'That is, if you're sure they relatives won't put in no claim, an' if you'll let me bring the money from time to time, just to show how I'm gettin' on, an' that I mean honest.' 'Well!' says Hugh and Co., surprised out of hisself, 'you'll excuse me, missus, but this beats cockfightin'!' 'It may or it mayn't,' says I; 'but there's one other thing I'd like to mention. Could ye saw off the broken end clean for me?' I says, 'for I see what it means, now you've told me, but other people won't, maybe. They'll think I got so far wi' the payments an' no further, or maybe they'll think I picked up with a damaged article, or again maybe they'll think I let it fall, like everything else in the world. I couldn' be in the churchyard all the time explainin', besides which I'm goin' over to Brefar to Young Matthey Hender, who've been a father to the fatherless, at five pounds a year and my keep.'"

"Get along with your story, woman," said the farmer hastily.

"Which he agreed," continued Mary Martha, "and I came over here an' saved an' saved till I had five pound put by! An' then I turned-to again, an' saved and saved till I had another five pound—if someone will be good enough to count. An' after that I saved an' saved another five. An' last of all I saved an' saved another five, an' that made *TWENTY!*"

Mary Martha ran up to the climax with a shout of triumph, and, ceasing abruptly, looked round the circle of her audience for the applause which was duly given.

"It's gospel truth, too, the woman be tellin'," said the farmer, rising from his meal and preparing to walk away.

Long years of ceaseless daily labour—and in the beginning, before the daffodils brought prosperity, they had been years of daily planning and contriving against want—had left him unapt for relaxation. He had been restless for some time before the close of Mary Martha's enthralling story.

"She hid it from us, too; though the Lord knows we'd ha' been ready to make a push an' help her t'wards the money."

"But 'twouldn't ha' been the same thing, maister," chuckled Mary Martha gleefully.

"No, woman, you're right there," he answered,

and went his way to look over his harvested fields ; also, if truth must be told, to rest a minute at the gate of each, bless God's mercy, and entreat it for his children, of whom the younger were all too young to remember less prosperous times.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW THE CHILDREN LEARNED TO PLAY.

"It must be a fine thing to live on the Main," said Annet thoughtfully.

The children turned their eyes together over the sea, across which the sunset, behind the cliff that shaded them, spread a soft radiance, warming a few high clouds with its afterglow. The Main was not visible from the low beach where they sat, but they knew where it lay afar, beyond the point of Iniscaw.

"Aye," said Dave, "and be rich enough to order a tombstone like that; and, when it's made, to tell the mason you've changed your mind."

"For my part," said Linnet, who was a practical little body, "I don't want to make acquaintance with any such whimsical people. You may be sure they'd look down on you, bein' so rich as they are; and I'd hate to live where I was looked down upon."

"I wasn't meaning," said Annet, "that I'd like to go over from here an' be treated as *they* chose. I meant it would be fine to be one o' them, an' so rich that you could look down on everybody else."

"But why *should* you?" put in Jan, puzzled.

"Oh, you don't understand!"

Here Bennet, who was practical as Linnet, but in a different way, opined that on the Main the Queen rode in a glass coach, which even the Mistress never did in the Islands.

"She couldn', not very well," retorted Linnet, ever a loyal Islander. "But there's glass windows to the cabin of her launch."

Here Mary Martha, whom the children allowed to listen to their talk, feeling no shyness with one so simple-hearted, laid her hands in her lap with a sigh.

"I've longed sometimes to be Queen of England," she confessed; "though it don't happen to me so often as it did when I was savin' up for the tombstone. But *that* cures me. Fancy me ridin' in a glass coach, with my unfortunate habits!"

"Let's pretend that one of us is goin' across to the Main to-morrow," suggested Bennet; "and we'll each choose what we'd like for a present. Dave's the eldest. Dave, you're to start by the steamer to-morrow, and——"

"But the steamer went to-day," Dave objected.

"Well, then, the day after to-morrow. It don't make any difference to our pretendin'."

"I didn't want to disappoint you, that's all. Very well, I'm to go the day after to-morrow," Dave

announced. "Now fire ahead, and choose what you want me to bring back."

"It's like the beginning of *Beauty and the Beast*," said Annet. "'Once upon a time there lived a merchant who had three daughters. A message came to him that he had to travel and do business in a country a long way off. So he called his daughters together, and asked what they would like him to bring home for fairings. The first daughter asked for a necklace of ruby stones and satin slippers and a canary bird in a golden cage. The second wanted a new kitten and some strings for a harp and a dress all over diamonds. But when it came to the third——'"

"Well, what did *she* want?" asked Dave, as Annet came to a halt.

Her face had flushed of a sudden.

"I don't know. . . . I didn' set out to tell you all the story."

"But *I* know!" cried Jan, sitting up suddenly and clutching two small pebbles he had been tossing idly in his hand. "The third one wanted a flower."

"She didn't!" Annet contradicted angrily. "Not first along, at any rate. And you don't know any stories; you told me so yourself, the day you came."

Jan passed the back of his hand over his eyes.

"No, first-along she didn't want anything; but

after that, because she didn't like to disappoint her father, she chose a flower. When her father was away on the main, and just about to start back for home, he found himself walking in a beautiful garden, and it came into his mind that he'd remembered to buy the other fairings, but forgotten about the flower for his youngest daughter. So he picked the prettiest he could see, when out from the bushes jumped a great roaring lion.

"'Who gave you leave to pick my flowers?' roared the lion. The merchant dropped on his knees, and cried out that he had only picked one. It was for his daughter who lived on the other side of the sea, and had made him promise to bring her home a flower. 'By right I ought to kill you,' said the lion, 'and I will only spare you if you promise to go home and fetch your daughter to me. Bring her to my palace and leave her here. You won't see anybody. But if you don't obey me, be sure I will kill you.' The merchant had to promise, and when he reached home, and told the news, they were all very sad. But the youngest was brave and said she must go, so her father took her back with him to the lion's palace and left her. They saw nobody, and when her father had gone she wandered about alone until she was tired, and at last, coming to a bedroom, she lay down and slept. But by and by she woke up. It was dark, and there was somebody

talking to her in the dark, and although she couldn't see his face she knew he was a beautiful Prince. He went away before daylight, but before going he told her that he would always love her, but he must always come in the dark, and she must never try to see his face."

"You're telling it all wrong!" broke in Annet. "That's not the story at all."

"It's a very good yarn, anyway," said Dave, as the child came to a stop, all confused; "and I don't see why you want to interrupt. Go on, Janny boy."

"She—she was never to see his face," pursued Jan; but the words came halting, and he seemed to be casting about for the broken thread of the story.

"She wanted too, more and more, and—oh, yes!—it goes on that one night while he was sleeping she lit a lamp—it was a lamp like the *chill* * up in the kitchen—and bent over to look at him. He was handsome, ten times handsomer than she had ever supposed. He was so handsome that her hand shook, and a drop of the hot oil fell on his shoulder. He opened his eyes, and then——"

* *Chill*, a stone lamp shaped like a candlestick and having a shallow saucer on top. A little train (fish) oil was poured into the saucer and a floating rush served for wick. Such a lamp was used up to recent years on the Islands; and the glimmer it gave was called by the housewife an "idle light," meaning that she and her maidens could not see to sew by it.

Jan came to a halt again.

"Tell us what happened!"

Annet was as eager now as the others.

"He—he flew away, out of her sight. She had broken her promise, you see. I don't rightly know the end," Jan confessed, rubbing his eyes perplexedly. Where had he learnt the story? It all came to him so clearly, up to a point. "I think she searched after him—yes, and at last they were married, and lived happy ever after," he wound up, like one repeating a lesson.

"I don't think much of a story that breaks off in the middle," said Annet cruelly. "Linnet, 'tis your turn. Tell us about Peter Piper that went down to the bottom of the sea and married a mermaid."

Linnet told the story of Peter Piper, and when Linnet had done another child told about the Piskies—how they stole a baby out of its cradle, and how the mother made them bring it back by boiling a crockful of eggshells.

Jan listened, tossing his two pebbles idly and catching them. It was queer. These stories also he had heard at sometime, somewhere, or else he had dreamed them—not exactly as the children were telling them, but so nearly that to all intents they were the same.

Dave's turn came next; but Dave for some min-

utes had been watching Jan and the way he tossed the pebbles, turning his hand and catching them neatly on the back of his knuckles.

"That's a funny game you are playin', little Jan. Who taught 'ee the trick of it?"

"Nobody," answered Jan, after considering a moment. "It came into my head one day, and I've been playing at it ever since, off and on. There are lots of different ways."

He added a third small pebble, tossed up all three and caught them on the back of his hand, where they lay disposed as though they had been carefully placed there. With a quick upward jerk he sent them in air again, to fall just as neatly upon the back of his other hand.

The children watched him curiously. One or two chose out pebbles, and tried to imitate these tricks. Within five minutes every child in the circle was engaged in the game, and laughing at one another's awkwardness. In this way Jan taught them the beginnings of a game old as the hills, played by shepherds and fisher boys on far-away Grecian Isles before ever Homer sang; and thus it came about that the Brefar children play at knuckle-bones to-day with oddly shaped pebbles. Also, unknowingly, he taught them to laugh. They were laughing yet when the bell tinkled up at the farm, summoning them home to supper and bed; and as

they climbed the hill echoes of their laughter floated back to the deserted beach.

The echoes died away, faded into the perpetual low hum of the tide races sweeping around the northern isles. In the twilight a belated bee continued at work—*z-z-zoom*—busy among the glimmering flowers of the Poet's Narcissus. The bee pitched on a flower which lay broken among them where Annet had tossed it, and entered its cup inquisitively.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE APPRENTICESHIP.

> You that build the shade-roof, and you that court the rays,
> You that leap besprinkling the rock stream-rent :
> He has been our fellow, the morning of our days ;
> Us he chose for house-mates, and this way went.
>
> *Phœbus with Admetus.*

So Jan continued with Young Farmer Matthey and grew up as one of the household. Our story has no concern with these years, beyond telling that he went with the other children to Brefar school, and was passably sharp with his books ; and that he grew into a handsome lad, fair-skinned, beautifully-limbed, cheerful and docile of temper. He never quarrelled, but would walk away whenever the children started bickering among themselves. On the other hand, he never quite broke through his shyness. He craved for their love, but (save unconsciously) could go no way to meet it, even when he taught them to laugh and play games. Only with Dave he had no reserve. If Dave was

David, Jan as surely was Jonathan. As a rule, between growing lads two years' difference of age is a gulf: but Jan (as the farmer put it) was old for his age, and in one particular he established a mastery which helped to bring them level.

They learned to swim together; and at swimming from the start the younger boy out-paced and out-distanced the elder. Dave had no jealousy in his nature. He toiled admiringly in Jan's wake, and it was he, not Jan, who boasted of Jan's beautiful diving. When they grew up and fitted out an old boat of the farmer's, it was Dave's turn to resume the mastery. Dave had a turn for carpentering. In steering and handling a boat, too, Dave was the teacher, Jan the learner. Moreover, Dave had a sense of navigation which Jan lacked; he seemed, being born to the Islands, to have an instinct for their rocks, shoals, and dangers, the set and run of the tides, what the wind would do next, and how far to trust it.

One other gift of Jan's must be mentioned, since by virtue of it he repaid the farmer's kindness. He developed a wonderful sense of flowers, so that none of the other children, between harvest and harvest, could compare with him. For to harvest the daffodils is simple enough; the grower's real skill shows itself in the between times, in divining when to lift and transplant, in sorting out the strong from the weakly

bulbs, in strengthening the soil, in choosing new situations and aspects. At the age of fourteen Jan appeared, merely by turning a bulb over in his hand, to know what it wanted. It was he, too, who discovered for the farmer that daffodil leaves, duly dried, make good fodder. The green leaves are poisonous for cattle; and hitherto the rakings of the fields—when the flowers' sap had run back into the bulbs—had been gathered in heaps and burnt. The farmer saved some, however, and used it for litter, never supposing that the cows would eat the dried stuff. Jan pointed out that they ate their bedding with relish, and moreover that they took no harm. Next year the farmer surprised his neighbours by building a rick of daffodil leaves alongside his hay-ricks.

Little by little, as the boy grew, the old longings, the old questionings, faded out of his mind. Work at Chy-an-Chy Farm was hard, if cheerful: the day over, he climbed the stairs to bed, too wholesomely tired to lie awake and fret, as he had been used to fret, asking "Who am I?" "How came I here?"

Maybe, too, the companionship of the patient cattle, the lesson of the flowers—so obedient, so unexacting, so eager and happy to do their best when the appointed time came, in spite of wind and storm—helped to discipline him.

The lily is most fair,
But says not, "I will only blow
Upon a southern land"; the cedar makes no coil
What rocks shall owe
The springs that wash his feet;
The crocus cannot arbitrate the foil
That for its purple radiance is most meet.—
Lord, even so
I ask one prayer;
The which if it be granted,
It skills not where
Thou plantest me, only I would be planted.

But the trouble awoke again.

One evening in early summer,—he was now in his fifteenth year,—he and Dave took a long swim together out to a naked island that stands about midway in Cromwell's Sound. The pair had spent the day in trimming hedges, working under a hot sun with their shirts open at the throat. The pollen of flowers, the blown seeds of early grasses, clung stickily to the sweat of their young bodies, and they sought the water as a salmon seeks the freshet to rid himself of sea-lice.

As usual, Jan quickly out-distanced Dave, and by and by, close under the rocks of the island, ceased swimming and turned over on his back, floating, waiting for Dave to come up. As he lay so, a sound came borne to him across the waters—a sound of a woman's voice singing.

He had never heard singing, save by the children in school, or by their elders in chapel, or at evening

prayer, droning out Wesley's hymns at distressful length. He had never imagined that any sound could ravish the ear as did this. He turned about and trod water gently, lifting his head to listen. On the Iniscaw shore a light shone among the dark deodars,—for twilight was falling,—and thence the voice sang to him.

With a few easy strokes he reached the island. He groped for a landing in the shadow of the rocks, found handhold and scrambled ashore. Still the divine voice floated over the waters.

He stood, naked, rigid as a statue, every nerve strung taut by it. Below his feet, somewhere in the shadow, Dave called up to him that the swim had been long—it was time to return.

"But listen!"

"It's the Lady, singing to herself. She has her window open, and sometimes, they say, you can hear every note as far as Brefar. Come back, Jan!"

Dave headed back as Jan dived. But Jan neither overtook him nor heeded his shouts. Dave, judging that he himself had barely strength enough left to swim back, swam doggedly on. Within a hundred yards of the beach his limbs began to feel as heavy as lead. But he struggled on and reached shore, his teeth chattering, his body shaking woefully as with an ague.

Meanwhile Jan was swimming for Iniscaw and the

voice. Of the long return he recked nothing. No thought crossed his mind that Dave might perhaps be in danger. He would at any time have given his life for Dave's; but just now he was oblivious of all save the voice, and he swam toward the lighted window as a moth is drawn to a lamp.

Within her room, high above the terrace, the lady sang to herself; and her song was "Caro Nome." Whoso will, let him despise; but when a great singer understands Verdi, it is a great and wonderful song. While the Lady sang, the moon—almost at its full—swam up above the deodars, and toward it Jan swam, toward the lamp beneath it, toward the scent wafted across the summer night from garden flowers and dark pines.

Loyal Dave, although his teeth chattered, had no sooner reached the shore than he dragged down the boat and—all naked—pushed across in search of his friend. The rowing by degrees brought back warmth to his blood. When he reached the farther side the Lady had ceased singing and pulled down the blind. He found Jan stretched naked on the sand, shivering, sobbing with exhaustion, and carefully ferried him home.

That was Dave all over—Dave, the good friend, solid, always ready at need.

But the time came when Dave must put on the

uniform of the Trinity House and go off to the lightship on the Stones.

The children saw him off tearfully, though he was cheerful enough. From the upper windows of Chy-an-Chy farmhouse they could see the white flash travelling across the waters from the lightship —three white flashes in twenty-four seconds, followed by darkness for thirty-six seconds—and knew, when the flashes came round again, that Dave was alive and well, and keeping watch.

The joy of Jan's life, however, was to welcome Dave home when the relief-boat brought him off; for life on a lightship is deadly trying to the nerves of most men, and the rule is—or then was—to relieve one-third of the crew every month, each man spending two months on board and taking a month's furlough on shore. Dave had no nerves; he said that with so much cleaning and polishing to do, out yonder, there was no time to be melancholy; and besides, there was a great deal more to talk about than anyone would think—tramp steamers heading round land (in time you got to know one and another like old friends, and to time their comings and goings); full sail to the southward making for the Channel; at the worst a school of porpoises, or a sun-fish, or a line of little murrs flying, or a gannet to watch by the hour, counting his dives. And sometimes the fishing-fleet would come out toward sunset, down

sail, and hang out their riding-lights, which gave a friendly feeling, though to be sure they came from the Main. By night, of course, there were the other sea-lights to watch, particularly the red light on North Island, which (said Dave) put him in mind of Chy-an-Chy window at supper-time.

Nevertheless, Dave allowed that it was good to be home ; especially on the first Sunday, when he put on his best shore-going clothes (Trinity House uniform) and the girls—Annet, Linnet and Bennet—wore their white frocks to church in the morning and to meeting house in the evening, this division of worship being the comfortable rule in the Islands (and, I dare say, no one a penny the worse for it). He said in his matter-of-fact way that even the smell of rotten fish at the corner of St. Lide's quay was good enough to come back to, but the best smell was that of the lilac-bush by the lych-gate of Brefar Church, because it had been in full bloom, with the early bees about it, at his first home-coming.

The next year he returned in the very height of the daffodil harvest, and Jan—kept busy from morning to night—saw little of him. Somewhere deep down in his heart was a feeling that Dave, having nothing to do on his furlough, might have spared more time to stand by his side in the fields and chat. He understood when Dave, the night before departure, drew him aside and told him shyly—after much pretence

of asking advice—that he and Annet had "made it up." "Of course," added Dave, "that don't make any difference to you and me."

"Of course," agreed Jan, believing him.

His own heart had not been seriously engaged, though from the first (now he came to think of it) Annet was by far the prettiest girl on Brefar, and therefore marked out to be Dave's sweetheart.

"I'd take it kindly," said Dave quite solemnly, "if you'd just bear that in mind. It was you, as a fact, that brought us together."

"Was it?" said Jan doubtfully, wondering when and how this could have happened.

"She thinks a lot of you too," said Dave. "She've told me so." He said it in a tone which conveyed that Jan ought to be proud, and proud Jan accordingly was. "Now I'm thinking that she'll be feelin' my goin' out to the Stones, this time, more'n ordinary."

"Of course, she will," Jan agreed.

"An' that," said his friend, "is where you can help. We can't be married till the summer after next; but meantime you can do a lot for us."

"Can I?" asked Jan doubtfully. "Well, I'll do my best. If only you mean what you say—that it—that *this*—'ll make no difference between us."

"Why should it?" (How splendid Dave looked as he asked the question!)

Jan never said a word to Annet concerning her troth with Dave, nor she a word to him. But on the day after Dave's departure he took her for a sail to cheer up her spirits, and they talked much of the hero by the way. Somehow it came to be understood that Jan, as Dave's friend, in a sense belonged to Annet, to be at her beck and call, and during that summer the pair sailed on many an excursion together among the off-islands, being absent at times for a whole afternoon—always after getting leave from the farmer.

There could be no harm in it. The farmer, though inclined to spoil Annet, knew her to be a shrewd girl and level-headed. (He was delighted, by the way, that she had chosen Dave ; for Dave, in addition to his other good qualities, was an only son, and his parents had a little money laid up in the savings bank. A better son-in-law could not be wished for.)

As for Jan, his loyalty to his friend was a household word, almost a household jest at Chy-an-Chy Farm. In these trips he now and again came near to wearying Annet with his hero-worship.

But when the relief boat brought Dave home, Jan would efface himself, asking no better reward than the old quiet understanding.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SAILING.

And the spring comes slowly up this way.

ONE day early in the next spring Annet suggested that instead of tacking among the off-islands they should sail boldly out for the Stones and pay a surprise visit to the light-vessel.

The enterprise was not so very audacious, after all. A steady, northerly breeze had been blowing all day and would certainly hold until sunset ; it was a "soldier's breeze," too, and would serve them going and coming. Moreover, this would be their last opportunity ; for the daffodil harvest was close at hand, and while it lasted there could be no more holidays.

Jan blamed himself because the suggestion had not come first from him—that Annet should have been left to make it.

On the way out they talked gaily for a while, anticipating Dave's astonishment. Then they fell to discussing the prospects of harvest. All pointed

to a good crop and good prices. The farmer would enjoy another prosperous season, and in the summer there would be a merry wedding.

"It's good to think," said Annet graciously, "that you and Dave will always be friends."

"We shall always be friends," said Jan, and added quickly, "Whatever becomes of me, I could never do other than love Dave."

His hand was on the tiller and trembled slightly; his eyes were fixed on the water ahead. The boat had broken the charmed circle of the island tides and danced over open sea.

"'*Whatever becomes of you*'?" echoed Annet. "Why, you never mean to leave Brefar, surely!"

"This summer, perhaps; after the wedding. Dave knows. I haven't told your father yet, and it won't be easy. But I belong to the Main, you know—somewhere." His gaze travelled ahead, eagerly. "I can't explain; but when you *belong* to the Main, you know——"

"Dave ought to have told me," said Annet pettishly. She was silent for a full minute. Then she asked, "And when you get to the Main, what will you do?"

"Who knows? I shall fall on my feet, never you fear."

"I heard father telling mother the other day that he was lucky to keep you. You could get good

gardener's wages anywhere, and his wonder was the Mistress hadn't heard of you and snapped you up."

"I don't suppose the Mistress wants a gardener more than she has," said Jan. "But anyway she'd never bear the sight of me—the teacher told me that. The Commandant was a friend of hers, you know; and he lost his life saving me."

Annet nodded, but she was not heeding.

"I don't see," she said, "that one needs belong to the Main to want to live there. I've longed for that, all my life. Dave, now—he's happy anywhere. I've asked him again and again how he can stand it, bobbing up an' down, up an' down, out yonder at the end of a chain. Then he laughs and says something foolish—that there's the holidays to look forward to, or some nonsense of that sort."

"And so he feels it."

"But 'tis no life for a man," insisted Annet, tapping her foot on the bottom boards. "Up an' down on the end of a chain, and looking forward to nothing but that all your life long."

"If he's happy—" began Jan.

"What about *me?*" asked Annet, almost fiercely.

She recovered her graciousness as they neared the light-vessel, and answered Dave's ecstatic signals with a sufficiently affectionate wave of her handkerchief.

Dave was in transports. He had recognised the

boat at two miles' distance, and as she rounded up alongside you would have thought the good fellow clean out of his mind.

"What a notion, too!" he kept shouting. "What a notion! Now, which of 'ee thought of it?"

"Why, Annet, of course," answered Jan.

"Ha, ha! Did she now? Did she really?" he fairly bellowed, while Annet blushed, and the crew—bronzed, friendly fellows—grinned down over-side.

"Oh, hush—*please!*" Annet entreated him in a vexed voice. "Makin' such a noise, an' before folks. If I'd known you'd behave like this——"

But honest Dave was not to be denied. He reached down his arms to lift her on board, and no sooner had her on deck than he kissed her unblushingly, whereat the crew laughed aloud. They caught the painter thrown by Jan, and as he jumped aboard after Annet, let the boat fall astern, to be made fast there.

The next hour was spent in admiring the ship, the machinery of the lantern, the hundred-and-one cunning little contrivances for economising space in galley, pantry, sleeping-bunks. It was all very wonderful and amazingly cosy, yet Jan kept marvelling how Dave, having once broken away from the Islands, could endure (as Annet put it) to live out his life tethered thus.

Annet had recovered her composure, and at tea—the crew insisted on making tea for them before they started for home—she reigned as a queen in the small cabin. The ship smelled potently of oil and brick-dust from end to end, and the smell was disagreeable to Jan.

"Well, an' what news o' the flowers?" demanded Dave.

They told him.

"As if I didn't know!" he shouted delightedly. "We can taste the flowers, even out here. There's the birds arrivin', too, to tell us that spring is comin' along."

On the whole, the surprise visit proved a great success. Yet Jan felt that something was lacking. He noted with some wonder that Dave, the lover, seemed to detect nothing amiss, and to be entirely, even to foolishness, content with Annet's behaviour and bearing.

The time came to say good-bye, and he and Annet sailed back towards the sunset, followed for a long way by the cheers of the lightship's crew. Jan steered. Annet sat on the mid-ship thwart gazing out to leeward under the sail.

For a mile and more they exchanged not a word.

At length Annet said slowly—

"That kind of life don't improve Dave, seemin' to me."

"Dave don't want improvin'," Jan answered her shortly.

There was a long pause, during which Annet watched the froth rushing by under the boat's lee. She broke it, saying—

"You must ha' noticed that I didn't like it."

"Aye," Jan replied, "I took note o' that."

Another long pause followed.

"An' that's to go on for ever an' ever, I suppose. An' with any pluck he might have gone to the Main and made his fortune."

"But he's content as he is, lookin' forward to you."

"An' what about *me?*" she cried for the second time that day. "D'ye think that's all I'm worth? Oh," she broke off, "some folk have no eyes in their head!"

But Jan had—and so had Annet. Wicked, enticing eyes hers were, albeit demurely dropped. They watched him from under their long lashes, and he read their meaning. They were asking him to betray his friend.

A shiver ran down his body. She was fair and desirable, but his grip tightened on the tiller as he lied bravely—

"I don't know what you mean, Annet."

She said no more until they reached the entrance of Cromwell's Sound and ran the boat in for shore at the accustomed cove, but her face was dark.

"It's late," said Jan; for indeed twilight had already gathered. "They'll be getting anxious about us, up yonder. You'd best run along and tell them it's all right, while I stow sail and haul the boat up."

Annet lingered. She had a mind to tell him that she was afraid of the gathering dark, but she knew very well that he would not believe her. But the devil was in her now, and she would not lose her game without a last throw. She went up some way along the path, and dashed aside among the darkling furze-bushes. There she would wait for him, and springing out, seize his arm as he came along. The scent of the furze-blossom was intoxicating as it floated close about her on the evening air.

The boat's keelson grated on the beach below. He was hauling her up, then, before lowering sail. Or had she missed to hear the creak of the sheave? If he was hauling the boat up, in another moment the keelson would grate again.

But half a minute passed. He was stumbling about in the boat. Then she heard the soft plash of a paddle, and not knowing what to make of it, stepped out into the pathway for a look. She was barely in time. While she stood there, doubting her eyes, the white sail slid past the southerly point of the cove and out of sight.

"Jan! Jan!"

Annet tore down to the beach, calling, demanding to know where he was bound,—what he meant by it? But Jan looked back once only as he paid out sheet. The northerly wind still held behind him, and he headed the boat straight down Cromwell's Sound for the roadstead. A light glimmered above the trees on Iniscaw shore; but the Lady might sing at the window now if she listed. No spell could any longer bind him. He had tasted liberty to-day and looked on fear; and while the one beckoned him, the other shouted him away from the Islands to his fate.

Still with a free sheet he ran across the roadstead, and hauling close under the lee of St. Lide's, fetched out past the land. He was in open water now, with the sea-lights and the stars for guides. The sea was smooth, and he could make no mistake.

At daybreak he saw the tall cliffs of the Main at no more than a mile's distance, rising sheer from the sea, their fissures pencilled with violet shadows; and following the coast-line southward, he came to a bay, wherein was a harbour thrice the size of St. Lide's Pool.

He steered in boldly. Half a dozen tall ships lay alongside the quay there, and on one of them a man was hauling up a red-white-and-green flag. Having hauled it chock-a-block, he proceeded to make fast

the halyards at the rail, and grinned down in friendly fashion as the boat slid close.

"Hi!"

"Hola!"

"Want a hand, do you?" asked Jan.

"*Siete Italiano?*"

Jan rounded alongside.

EPILOGUE.

THE good harvest was over. The family had celebrated its close, as usual, by a "tea-drinking" on Brefar beach, and were wending homeward up the hill through the dusk; but on the beach a young man and a maid loitered, listening to their voices.

"Poor old Jan!" said Dave thoughtfully. "I wonder what took him? Didn't notice anything queer with him that day, did you? *I* didn't."

"He was always queer," answered Annet. "You never can depend on folks from the Main."

"You used to worry me about going to live there, one time," Dave reminded her.

"Girls can't help havin' their silly notions."

"No, I suppose. But poor old Jan! I wonder if he'll write to us some day. He ought, you know, for I never had no other real friend," mused Dave wistfully.

"What does it matter?" asked Annet. "Haven't we one another?"

At their feet, unnoted by them, a narcissus

bloomed ; a flower with white perianth and a cup of flame. This year it must bloom in patience and fade—this year, and another, and another, until Young Farmer Matthey comes along with a sharper eye than any of his children's and discovers it, the glory of the Islands.

THE END.

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