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THE WORKS OF
WILKIE COLLINS

VOLUME FOUR

WITH FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS

MAN AND WIFE

A Novel

(PART TWO)

SHORT STORIES

MISS OR MRS.?
THE FROZEN DEEP

40

NEW YORK
PETER FENELON COLLIER, PUBLISHER

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

VOLUME FOUR.

MAN AND WIFE.

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MAN AND WIFE.

CHAPTER THE THIRTY-EIGHTH.

THE NEWS FROM GLASGOW.

THE letters to Lady Lundie and to Mr. Crum having been dispatched on Monday, the return of the post might be looked for on Wednesday afternoon at Ham Farm.

Sir Patrick and Arnold held more than one private consultation, during the interval, on the delicate and difficult subject of admitting Blanche to a knowledge of what had happened. The wise elder advised, and the inexperienced junior listened. "Think of it," said Sir Patrick; "and do it." And Arnold thought of it—and left it undone.

Let those who feel inclined to blame him remember that he had only been married a fortnight. It is hard, surely, after but two weeks' possession of your wife, to appear before her in

the character of an offender on trial—and to find that an angel of retribution has been thrown into the bargain by the liberal destiny which bestowed on you the woman whom you adore!

They were all three at home on the Wednesday afternoon, looking out for the postman.

The correspondence delivered included (exactly as Sir Patrick had foreseen) a letter from Lady Lundie. Further investigation, on the far more interesting subject of the expected news from Glasgow, revealed—nothing. The lawyer had not answered Sir Patrick's inquiry by return of post.

“Is that a bad sign?” asked Blanche.

“It is a sign that something has happened,” answered her uncle. “Mr. Crum is possibly expecting to receive some special information, and is waiting on the chance of being able to communicate it. We must hope, my dear, in tomorrow's post.”

“Open Lady Lundie's letter in the meantime,” said Blanche. “Are you sure it is for you—and not for me?”

There was no doubt about it. Her ladyship's reply was ominously addressed to her ladyship's brother-in-law. “I know what that means,” said Blanche, eying her uncle eagerly while he was reading the letter. “If you mention Anne's name you insult my stepmother. I have mentioned it freely. Lady Lundie is mortally offended with me.”

Rash judgment of youth! A lady who takes a dignified attitude, in a family emergency, is

never mortally offended—she is only deeply grieved. Lady Lundie took a dignified attitude. “I well know,” wrote this estimable and Christian woman, “that I have been all along regarded in the light of an intruder by the family connections of my late beloved husband. But I was hardly prepared to find myself entirely shut out from all domestic confidence, at a time when some serious domestic catastrophe has but too evidently taken place. I have no desire, dear Sir Patrick, to intrude. Feeling it, however, to be quite inconsistent with a due regard for my own position (after what has happened) to correspond with Blanche, I addressed myself to the head of the family, purely in the interests of propriety. Permit me to ask whether—under circumstances which appear to be serious enough to require the recall of my stepdaughter and her husband from their wedding-tour—you think it DECENT to keep the widow of the late Sir Thomas Lundie entirely in the dark? Pray consider this—not at all out of regard for Me!—but out of regard for your own position with Society. Curiosity is, as you know, foreign to my nature. But when this dreadful scandal (whatever it may be) comes out—which, dear Sir Patrick, it cannot fail to do—what will the world think, when it asks for Lady Lundie’s opinion, and hears that Lady Lundie knew nothing about it? Whichever way you may decide, I shall take no offense. I may possibly be wounded—but that won’t matter. My little round of duties will find me still earnest, still cheerful. And even if you

shut me out, my best wishes will find their way, nevertheless, to Ham Farm. May I add—without encountering a sneer—that the prayers of a lonely woman are offered for the welfare of all?”

“Well?” said Blanche.

Sir Patrick folded up the letter, and put it in his pocket.

“You have your stepmother’s best wishes, my dear.” Having answered in those terms, he bowed to his niece with his best grace, and walked out of the room.

“Do I think it decent,” he repeated to himself, as he closed the door, “to leave the widow of the late Sir Thomas Lundie in the dark? When a lady’s temper is a little ruffled, I think it more than decent, I think it absolutely desirable, to let that lady have the last word.” He went into the library, and dropped his sister-in-law’s remonstrance into a box, labeled “Unanswered Letters.” Having got rid of it in that way, he hummed his favorite little Scotch air, and put on his hat, and went out to sun himself in the garden.

Meanwhile, Blanche was not quite satisfied with Sir Patrick’s reply. She appealed to her husband. “There is something wrong,” she said—“and my uncle is hiding it from me.”

Arnold could have desired no better opportunity than she had offered to him, in those words, for making the long-deferred disclosure to her of the truth. He lifted his eyes to Blanche’s face. By an unhappy fatality she was looking charmingly that morning. How would she look if he

told her the story of the hiding at the inn? Arnold was still in love with her—and Arnold said nothing.

The next day's post brought not only the anticipated letter from Mr. Crum, but an unexpected Glasgow newspaper as well.

This time Blanche had no reason to complain that her uncle kept his correspondence a secret from her. After reading the lawyer's letter, with an interest and agitation which showed that the contents had taken him by surprise, he handed it to Arnold and his niece. "Bad news there," he said. "We must share it together."

After acknowledging the receipt of Sir Patrick's letter of inquiry, Mr. Crum began by stating all that he knew of Miss Silvester's movements—dating from the time when she had left the Sheep's Head Hotel. About a fortnight since he had received a letter from her informing him that she had found a suitable place of residence in a village near Glasgow. Feeling a strong interest in Miss Silvester, Mr. Crum had visited her some few days afterward. He had satisfied himself that she was lodging with respectable people, and was as comfortably situated as circumstances would permit. For a week more he had heard nothing from the lady. At the expiration of that time he had received a letter from her, telling him that she had read something in a Glasgow newspaper, of that day's date, which seriously concerned herself, and which would oblige her to travel northward im-

mediately as fast as her strength would permit. At a later period, when she would be more certain of her own movements, she engaged to write again, and let Mr. Crum know where he might communicate with her if necessary. In the meantime, she could only thank him for his kindness, and beg him to take care of any letters or messages which might be left for her. Since the receipt of this communication the lawyer had heard nothing further. He had waited for the morning's post in the hope of being able to report that he had received some further intelligence. The hope had not been realized. He had now stated all that he knew himself thus far—and he had forwarded a copy of the newspaper alluded to by Miss Silvester, on the chance that an examination of it by Sir Patrick might possibly lead to further discoveries. In conclusion, he pledged himself to write again the moment he had any information to send.

Blanche snatched up the newspaper, and opened it. "Let me look!" she said. "I can find what Anne saw here, if anybody can!"

She ran her eye eagerly over column after column and page after page, and dropped the newspaper on her lap with a gesture of despair.

"Nothing!" she exclaimed. "Nothing anywhere, that I can see, to interest Anne. Nothing to interest anybody—except Lady Lundie," she went on, brushing the newspaper off her lap. "It turns out to be all true, Arnold, at Swanhaven. Geoffrey Delamayn *is* going to marry Mrs. Glenarm."

“What!” cried Arnold; the idea instantly flashing on him that this was the news which Anne had seen.

Sir Patrick gave him a warning look, and picked up the newspaper from the floor.

“I may as well run through it, Blanche, and make quite sure that you have missed nothing,” he said.

The report to which Blanche had referred was among the paragraphs arranged under the heading of “Fashionable News.” “A matrimonial alliance” (the Glasgow journal announced) “was in prospect between the Honorable Geoffrey Delamayn and the lovely and accomplished relict of the late Matthew Glenarm, Esq., formerly Miss Newenden.” The marriage would, in all probability, “be solemnized in Scotland, before the end of the present autumn;” and the wedding breakfast, it was whispered, “would collect a large and fashionable party at Swanhaven Lodge.”

Sir Patrick handed the newspaper silently to Arnold. It was plain to any one who knew Anne Silvester’s story that those were the words which had found their fatal way to her in her place of rest. The inference that followed seemed to be hardly less clear. But one intelligible object, in the opinion of Sir Patrick, could be at the end of her journey to the North. The deserted woman had rallied the last relics of her old energy—and had devoted herself to the desperate purpose of stopping the marriage of Mrs. Glenarm.

Blanche was the first to break the silence.

“It seems like a fatality,” she said. “Perpetual failure! Perpetual disappointment! Are Anne and I doomed never to meet again?”

She looked at her uncle. Sir Patrick showed none of his customary cheerfulness in the face of disaster.

“She has promised to write to Mr. Crum,” he said. “And Mr. Crum has promised to let us know when he hears from her. That is the only prospect before us. We must accept it as resignedly as we can.”

Blanche wandered out listlessly among the flowers in the conservatory. Sir Patrick made no secret of the impression produced upon him by Mr. Crum’s letter, when he and Arnold were left alone.

“There is no denying,” he said, “that matters have taken a very serious turn. My plans and calculations are all thrown out. It is impossible to foresee what new mischief may not come of it, if those two women meet; or what desperate act Delamayn may not commit, if he finds himself driven to the wall. As things are, I own frankly I don’t know what to do next. A great light of the Presbyterian Church,” he added, with a momentary outbreak of his whimsical humor, “once declared, in my hearing, that the invention of printing was nothing more nor less than a proof of the intellectual activity of the Devil. Upon my honor, I feel for the first time in my life inclined to agree with him.”

He mechanically took up the Glasgow journal, which Arnold had laid aside, while he spoke.

“What’s this!” he exclaimed, as a name caught his eye in the first line of the newspaper at which he happened to look. “Mrs. Glenarm again! Are they turning the iron-master’s widow into a public character?”

There the name of the widow was, unquestionably; figuring for the second time in type, in a letter of the gossiping sort, supplied by an “Occasional Correspondent,” and distinguished by the title of “Sayings and Doings in the North.” After tattling pleasantly of the prospects of the shooting season, of the fashions from Paris, of an accident to a tourist, and of a scandal in the Scottish Kirk, the writer proceeded to the narrative of a case of interest, relating to a marriage in the sphere known (in the language of footmen) as the sphere of “high life.”

Considerable sensation (the correspondent announced) had been caused in Perth and its neighborhood, by the exposure of an anonymous attempt at extortion, of which a lady of distinction had lately been made the object. As her name had already been publicly mentioned in an application to the magistrates, there could be no impropriety in stating that the lady in question was Mrs. Glenarm, whose approaching union with the Honorable Geoffrey Delamayn was alluded to in another column of the journal.

Mrs. Glenarm had, it appeared, received an anonymous letter, on the first day of her arrival as guest at the house of a friend residing in the neighborhood of Perth. The letter warned her that there was an obstacle, of which she was her-

self probably not aware, in the way of her projected marriage with Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn. That gentleman had seriously compromised himself with another lady; and the lady would oppose his marriage to Mrs. Glenarm, with proof in writing to produce in support of her claim. The proof was contained in two letters exchanged between the parties, and signed by their names; and the correspondence was placed at Mrs. Glenarm's disposal, on two conditions, as follows:

First, that she should offer a sufficiently liberal price to induce the present possessor of the letters to part with them. Secondly, that she should consent to adopt such a method of paying the money as should satisfy the person that he was in no danger of finding himself brought within reach of the law. The answer to these two proposals was directed to be made through the medium of an advertisement in the local newspaper—distinguished by this address, “To a Friend in the Dark.”

Certain turns of expression, and one or two mistakes in spelling, pointed to this insolent letter as being, in all probability, the production of a Scotchman, in the lower ranks of life. Mrs. Glenarm had at once shown it to her nearest relative, Captain Newenden. The captain had sought legal advice in Perth. It had been decided, after due consideration, to insert the advertisement demanded, and to take measures to entrap the writer of the letter into revealing himself—without, it is needless to add, allowing

the fellow really to profit by his attempted act of extortion.

The cunning of the "Friend in the Dark" (whoever he might be) had, on trying the proposed experiment, proved to be more than a match for the lawyers. He had successfully eluded not only the snare first set for him, but others subsequently laid. A second, and a third, anonymous letter, one more impudent than the other, had been received by Mrs. Glenarm, assuring that lady and the friends who were acting for her that they were only wasting time, and raising the price which would be asked for the correspondence, by the course they were taking. Captain Newenden had thereupon, in default of knowing what other course to pursue, appealed publicly to the city magistrates; and a reward had been offered, under the sanction of the municipal authorities, for the discovery of the man. This proceeding also having proved quite fruitless, it was understood that the captain had arranged, with the concurrence of his English solicitors, to place the matter in the hands of an experienced officer of the London police.

Here, so far as the newspaper correspondent was aware, the affair rested for the present.

It was only necessary to add, that Mrs. Glenarm had left the neighborhood of Perth, in order to escape further annoyance; and had placed herself under the protection of friends in another part of the county. Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn, whose fair fame had been assailed (it was needless, the correspondent added in parenthesis, to

say how groundlessly), was understood to have expressed, not only the indignation natural under the circumstances, but also his extreme regret at not finding himself in a position to aid Captain Newenden's efforts to bring the anonymous slanderer to justice. The honorable gentleman was, as the sporting public were well aware, then in course of strict training for his forthcoming appearance at the Fulham Foot-race. So important was it considered that his mind should not be harassed by annoyances, in his present responsible position, that his trainer and his principal backers had thought it desirable to hasten his removal to the neighborhood of Fulham—where the exercises which were to prepare him for the race were now being continued on the spot.

“The mystery seems to thicken,” said Arnold.

“Quite the contrary,” returned Sir Patrick, briskly. “The mystery is clearing fast—thanks to the Glasgow newspaper. I shall be spared the trouble of dealing with Bishopriggs for the stolen letter. Miss Silvester has gone to Perth, to recover her correspondence with Geoffrey Delamayn.”

“Do you think she would recognize it,” said Arnold, pointing to the newspaper, “in the account given of it here?”

“Certainly! And she could hardly fail, in my opinion, to get a step further than that. Unless I am entirely mistaken, the authorship of the anonymous letters has not mystified *her*.”

“How could she guess at that?”

“In this way, as I think. Whatever she may have previously thought, she must suspect, by this time, that the missing correspondence has been stolen, and not lost. Now, there are only two persons whom she can think of as probably guilty of the theft—Mrs. Inchbare or Bishopriggs. The newspaper description of the style of the anonymous letters declares it to be the style of a Scotchman in the lower ranks of life—in other words, points plainly to Bishopriggs. You see that? Very well. Now suppose she recovers the stolen property. What is likely to happen then? She will be more or less than woman if she doesn't make her way next, provided with her proofs in writing, to Mrs. Glenarm. She may innocently help, or she may innocently frustrate, the end we have in view—either way, our course is clear before us again. Our interest in communicating with Miss Silvester remains precisely the same interest that it was before we received the Glasgow newspaper. I propose to wait till Sunday, on the chance that Mr. Crum may write again. If we don't hear from him, I shall start for Scotland on Monday morning, and take my chance of finding my way to Miss Silvester, through Mrs. Glenarm.”

“Leaving me behind?”

“Leaving you behind. Somebody must stay with Blanche. After having only been a fortnight married, must I remind you of that?”

“Don't you think Mr. Crum will write before Monday?”

“It will be such a fortunate circumstance for us, if he does write, that I don’t venture to anticipate it.”

“You are down on our luck, sir.”

“I detest slang, Arnold. But slang, I own, expresses my state of mind, in this instance, with an accuracy which almost reconciles me to the use of it—for once in a way.”

“Everybody’s luck turns sooner or later,” persisted Arnold. “I can’t help thinking *our* luck is on the turn at last. Would you mind taking a bet, Sir Patrick?”

“Apply at the stables. I leave betting, as I leave cleaning the horses, to my groom.”

With that crabbed answer he closed the conversation for the day.

The hours passed, and time brought the post again in due course—and the post decided in Arnold’s favor! Sir Patrick’s want of confidence in the favoring patronage of Fortune was practically rebuked by the arrival of a second letter from the Glasgow lawyer on the next day.

“I have the pleasure of announcing” (Mr. Crum wrote) “that I have heard from Miss Silvester, by the next postal delivery ensuing, after I had dispatched my letter to Ham Farm. She writes, very briefly, to inform me that she has decided on establishing her next place of residence in London. The reason assigned for taking this step—which she certainly did not contemplate when I last saw her—is, that she finds herself approaching the end of her pe-

cuniary resources. Having already decided on adopting, as a means of living, the calling of a concert-singer, she has arranged to place her interests in the hands of an old friend of her late mother (who appears to have belonged also to the musical profession): a dramatic and musical agent long established in the metropolis, and well known to her as a trustworthy and respectable man. She sends me the name and address of this person—a copy of which you will find on the inclosed slip of paper—in the event of my having occasion to write to her, before she is settled in London. This is the whole substance of her letter. I have only to add, that it does not contain the slightest allusion to the nature of the errand on which she left Glasgow.”

Sir Patrick happened to be alone when he opened Mr. Crum’s letter.

His first proceeding, after reading it, was to consult the railway time-table hanging in the hall. Having done this, he returned to the library—wrote a short note of inquiry, addressed to the musical agent—and rang the bell.

“Miss Silvester is expected in London, Duncan. I want a discreet person to communicate with her. You are the person.”

Duncan bowed. Sir Patrick handed him the note.

“If you start at once you will be in time to catch the train. Go to that address, and inquire for Miss Silvester. If she has arrived, give her my compliments, and say I will have the honor

of calling on her (on Mr. Brinkworth's behalf) at the earliest date which she may find it convenient to appoint. Be quick about it—and you will have time to get back before the last train. Have Mr. and Mrs. Brinkworth returned from their drive?"

"No, Sir Patrick."

Pending the return of Arnold and Blanche, Sir Patrick looked at Mr. Crum's letter for the second time.

He was not quite satisfied that the pecuniary motive was really the motive at the bottom of Anne's journey south. Remembering that Geoffrey's trainers had removed him to the neighborhood of London, he was inclined to doubt whether some serious quarrel had not taken place between Anne and Mrs. Glenarm—and whether some direct appeal to Geoffrey himself might not be in contemplation as the result. In that event, Sir Patrick's advice and assistance would be placed, without scruple, at Miss Silvester's disposal. By asserting her claim, in opposition to the claim of Mrs. Glenarm, she was also asserting herself to be an unmarried woman, and was thus serving Blanche's interests as well as her own. "I owe it to Blanche to help her," thought Sir Patrick. "And I owe it to myself to bring Geoffrey Delamayn to a day of reckoning if I can."

The barking of the dogs in the yard announced the return of the carriage. Sir Patrick went out to meet Arnold and Blanche at the gate, and tell them the news.

Punctual to the time at which he was expected, the discreet Duncan re-appeared with a note from the musical agent.

Miss Silvester had not yet reached London; but she was expected to arrive not later than Tuesday in the ensuing week. The agent had already been favored with her instructions to pay the strictest attention to any commands received from Sir Patrick Lundie. He would take care that Sir Patrick's message should be given to Miss Silvester as soon as she arrived.

At last, then, there was news to be relied on! At last there was a prospect of seeing her! Blanche was radiant with happiness. Arnold was in high spirits for the first time since his return from Baden.

Sir Patrick tried hard to catch the infection of gayety from his young friends; but, to his own surprise, not less than to theirs, the effort proved fruitless. With the tide of events turning decidedly in his favor—relieved of the necessity of taking a doubtful journey to Scotland; assured of obtaining his interview with Anne in a few days' time—he was out of spirits all through the evening.

“Still down on our luck!” exclaimed Arnold, as he and his host finished their last game of billiards, and parted for the night. “Surely, we couldn't wish for a more promising prospect than *our* prospect next week?”

Sir Patrick laid his hand on Arnold's shoulder.

“Let us look indulgently together,” he said, in his whimsically grave way, “at the humili-

ating spectacle of an old man's folly. I feel at this moment, Arnold, as if I would give everything that I possess in the world to have passed over next week, and to be landed safely in the time beyond it."

"But why?"

"There is the folly! I can't tell why. With every reason to be in better spirits than usual, I am unaccountably, irrationally, invincibly depressed. What are we to conclude from that? Am I the object of a supernatural warning of misfortune to come? Or am I the object of a temporary derangement of the functions of the liver? There is the question. Who is to decide it? How contemptible is humanity, Arnold, rightly understood! Give me my candle, and let's hope it's the liver."

EIGHTH SCENE.—THE PANTRY.

CHAPTER THE THIRTY-NINTH.

ANNE WINS A VICTORY.

ON a certain evening in the month of September (at that period of the month when Arnold and Blanche were traveling back from Baden to Ham Farm) an ancient man—with one eye filmy

and blind, and one eye moist and merry—sat alone in the pantry of the Harp of Scotland Inn, Perth, pounding the sugar softly in a glass of whisky-punch. He has hitherto been personally distinguished in these pages as the self-appointed father of Anne Silvester and the humble servant of Blanche at the dance at Swanhaven Lodge. He now dawns on the view in amicable relations with a third lady, and assumes the mystic character of Mrs. Glenarm's "Friend in the Dark." Arriving in Perth the day after the festivities at Swanhaven, Bishopriggs proceeded to the Harp of Scotland—at which establishment for the reception of travelers he possessed the advantage of being known to the landlord as Mrs. Inchbare's right-hand man, and of standing high on the head-waiter's list of old and intimate friends.

Inquiring for the waiter first by the name of Thomas (otherwise Tammy) Pennyquick, Bishopriggs found his friend in sore distress of body and mind. Contending vainly against the disabling advances of rheumatism, Thomas Pennyquick ruefully contemplated the prospect of being laid up at home by a long illness—with a wife and children to support, and with the emoluments attached to his position passing into the pockets of the first stranger who could be found to occupy his place at the inn.

Hearing this doleful story, Bishopriggs cunningly saw his way to serving his own private interests by performing the part of Thomas Pennyquick's generous and devoted friend.

He forthwith offered to fill the place, without taking the emoluments of the invalided head-waiter—on the understanding, as a matter of course, that the landlord consented to board and lodge him free of expense at the inn. The landlord having readily accepted this condition, Thomas Pennyquick retired to the bosom of his family. And there was Bishopriggs, doubly secure behind a respectable position and a virtuous action, against all likelihood of suspicion falling on him, as a stranger in Perth—in the event of his correspondence with Mrs. Glenarm being made the object of legal investigation on the part of her friends!

Having opened the campaign in this masterly manner, the same sagacious foresight had distinguished the operations of Bishopriggs throughout.

His correspondence with Mrs. Glenarm was invariably written with the left hand—the writing thus produced defying detection, in all cases, as bearing no resemblance of character whatever to writing produced by persons who habitually use the other hand. A no less far-sighted cunning distinguished his proceedings in answering the advertisements which the lawyers duly inserted in the newspaper. He appointed hours at which he was employed on business-errands for the inn, and places which lay on the way to those errands, for his meetings with Mrs. Glenarm's representatives: a pass-word being determined on, as usual in such cases, by exchanging which the persons concerned could discover each

other. However carefully the lawyers might set the snare—whether they had their necessary “witness” disguised as an artist sketching in the neighborhood, or as an old woman selling fruit, or what not—the wary eye of Bishopriggs detected it. He left the pass-word unspoken; he went his way on his errand; he was followed on suspicion; and he was discovered to be only “a respectable person,” charged with a message by the landlord of the Harp of Scotland Inn.

To a man intrenched behind such precautions as these, the chance of being detected might well be reckoned among the last of all the chances that could possibly happen.

Discovery was, nevertheless, advancing on Bishopriggs from a quarter which had not been included in his calculations. Anne Silvester was in Perth; forewarned by the newspaper (as Sir Patrick had guessed) that the letters offered to Mrs. Glenarm were the letters between Geoffrey and herself, which she had lost at Craig Fernie, and bent on clearing up the suspicion which pointed to Bishopriggs as the person who was trying to turn the correspondence to pecuniary account. The inquiries made for him, at Anne’s request, as soon as she arrived in the town, openly described his name, and his former position as head-waiter at Craig Fernie—and thus led easily to the discovery of him, in his publicly avowed character of Thomas Pennyquick’s devoted friend. Toward evening, on the day after she reached Perth, the news came to Anne that Bishopriggs was in service at the inn known as the

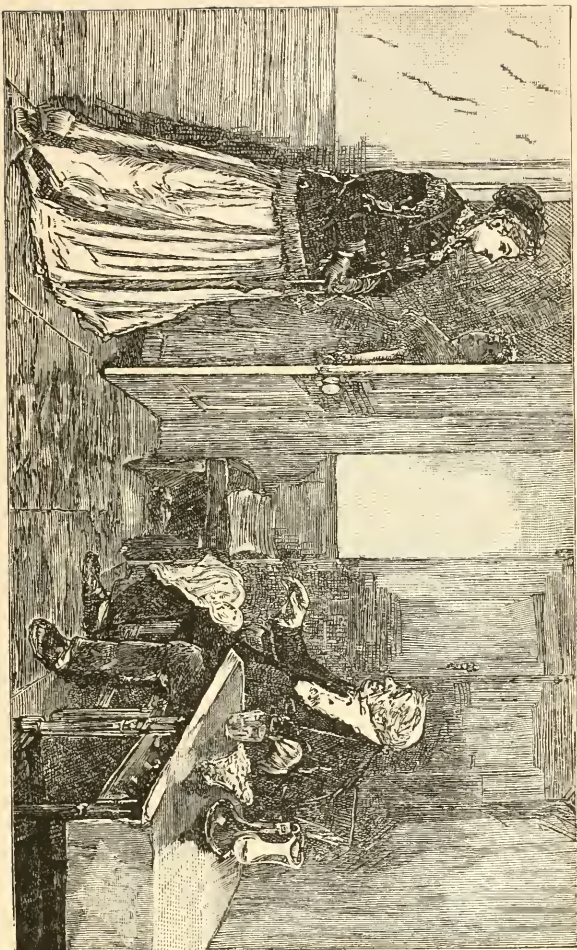
Harp of Scotland. The landlord of the hotel at which she was staying inquired whether he should send a message for her. She answered, "No, I will take my message myself. All I want is a person to show me the way to the inn."

Secluded in the solitude of the head-waiter's pantry, Bishopriggs sat peacefully melting the sugar in his whisky-punch.

It was the hour of the evening at which a period of tranquillity generally occurred before what was called the "night business" of the house began. Bishopriggs was accustomed to drink and meditate daily in this interval of repose. He tasted the punch, and smiled contentedly as he set down his glass. The prospect before him looked fairly enough. He had outwitted the lawyers in the preliminary negotiations thus far. All that was needful now was to wait till the terror of a public scandal (sustained by occasional letters from her "Friend in the Dark") had its due effect on Mrs. Glenarm, and hurried her into paying the purchase-money for the correspondence with her own hand. "Let it breed in the brain," he thought, "and the siller will soon come out o' the purse."

His reflections were interrupted by the appearance of a slovenly maid-servant, with a cotton handkerchief tied round her head, and an uncleaned saucepan in her hand.

"Eh, Maister Bishopriggs," cried the girl, "here's a braw young leddy speerin' for ye by yer ain name at the door."



“MY AIN SISTER’S CHILD!” CRIED BISHOPRIGGS.

—Man and Wife, Vol. Four, page 25.

“A leddy?” repeated Bishopriggs, with a look of virtuous disgust. “Ye donnert ne’er-doweel, do you come to a decent, ’sponsible man like me, wi’ sic a Cyprian overture as that? What d’ye tak’ me for? Mark Antony that lost the world for love (the mair fule he!)? or Don Jovanny that counted his concubines by hundreds, like the blessed Solomon himself? Awa’ wi’ ye to yer pots and pans; and bid the wandering Venus that sent ye go spin!”

Before the girl could answer she was gently pulled aside from the door-way, and Bishopriggs, thunderstruck, saw Anne Silvester standing in her place.

“You had better tell the servant I am no stranger to you,” said Anne, looking toward the kitchen-maid, who stood in the passage staring at her in stolid amazement.

“My ain sister’s child!” cried Bishopriggs, lying with his customary readiness. “Go yer ways, Maggie. The bonny lassie’s my ain kith and kin. The tongue o’ scandal, I trow, has naething to say against that.—Lord save us and guide us!” he added in another tone, as the girl closed the door on them, “what brings ye here?”

“I have something to say to you. I am not very well; I must wait a little first. Give me a chair.”

Bishopriggs obeyed in silence. His one available eye rested on Anne, as he produced the chair, with an uneasy and suspicious attention. “I’m wanting to know one thing,” he said. “By

what meeraiculous means, young madam, do ye happen to ha' fund yer way to this inn?"

Anne told him how her inquiries had been made, and what the result had been, plainly and frankly. The clouded face of Bishopriggs began to clear again.

"Hech! hech!" he exclaimed, recovering all his native impudence, "I hae had occasion to remark already, to anither leddy than yersel', that it's seemply mairvelous hoo a man's ain gude deeds find him oot in this lower warld o' ours. I hae dune a gude deed by pure Tammy Pennyquick, and here's a' Pairth ringing wi' the report o' it; and Sawmuel Bishopriggs sae weel known that ony stranger has only to ask, and find him. Understand, I beseech ye, that it's no hand o' mine that pets this new feather in my cap. As a gude Calvinist, my saul's clear o' the smallest figment o' belief in Warks. When I look at my ain celeebrity I joost ask, as the Psawmist asked before me, 'Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?' It seems ye've something to say to me," he added, suddenly reverting to the object of Anne's visit. "Is it humanly possible that ye can ha' come a' the way to Pairth for naething but that."

The expression of suspicion began to show itself again in his face. Concealing as she best might the disgust that he inspired in her, Anne stated her errand in the most direct manner, and in the fewest possible words.

"I have come here to ask you for something," she said.

“Ay? ay? What may it be ye’re wanting of me?”

“I want the letter I lost at Craig Fernie.”

Even the solidly-founded self-possession of Bishopriggs himself was shaken by the startling directness of that attack on it. His glib tongue was paralyzed for the moment. “I dinna ken what ye’re drivin’ at,” he said, after an interval, with a sullen consciousness that he had been all but tricked into betraying himself.

The change in his manner convinced Anne that she had found in Bishopriggs the person of whom she was in search.

“You have got my letter,” she said, sternly insisting on the truth. “And you are trying to turn it to a disgraceful use. I won’t allow you to make a market of my private affairs. You have offered a letter of mine for sale to a stranger. I insist on your restoring it to me before I leave this room!”

Bishopriggs hesitated again. His first suspicion that Anne had been privately instructed by Mrs. Glenarn’s lawyers returned to his mind as a suspicion confirmed. He felt the vast importance of making a cautious reply.

“I’ll no’ waste precious time,” he said, after a moment’s consideration with himself, “in brushing awa’ the fawse breath o’ scandal, when it passes my way. It blaws to nae purpose, my young leddy, when it blaws on an honest man like me. Fie for shame on ye for saying what ye’ve joost said—to me that was a fether to ye at Craig Fernie! Wha’ set ye on to it? Will it

be man or woman that's misca'ed me behind my back?"

Anne took the Glasgow newspaper from the pocket of her traveling-cloak, and placed it before him, open at the paragraph which described the act of extortion attempted on Mrs. Glenarm.

"I have found there," she said, "all that I want to know."

"May a' the tribe o' editors, preenters, paper-makers, news-venders, and the like, bleeze together in the pit o' Tophet!" With this devout aspiration—internally felt, not openly uttered—Bishopriggs put on his spectacles, and read the passage pointed out to him. "I see naething here touching the name o' Sawmuel Bishopriggs, or the matter o' ony loss ye may or may not ha' had at Craig Fernie," he said, when he had done; still defending his position, with a resolution worthy of a better cause.

Anne's pride recoiled at the prospect of prolonging the discussion with him. She rose to her feet, and said her last words.

"I have learned enough by this time," she answered, "to know that the one argument that prevails with you is the argument of money. If money will spare me the hateful necessity of disputing with you—poor as I am, money you shall have. Be silent, if you please. You are personally interested in what I have to say next."

She opened her purse, and took a five-pound note from it.

"If you choose to own the truth, and produce the letter," she resumed, "I will give you this,

as your reward for finding and restoring to me something that I had lost. If you persist in your present prevarication, I can, and will, make that sheet of note-paper you have stolen from me nothing but waste paper in your hands. You have threatened Mrs. Glenarm with my interference. Suppose I go to Mrs. Glenarm? Suppose I interfere before the week is out? Suppose I have other letters of Mr. Delamayn's in my possession, and produce them to speak for me? What has Mrs. Glenarm to purchase of you *then*? Answer me that!"

The color rose on her pale face. Her eyes, dim and weary when she entered the room, looked him brightly through and through in immeasurable contempt. "Answer me that!" she repeated, with a burst of her old energy which revealed the fire and passion of the woman's nature, not quenched even yet!

If Bishopriggs had a merit, it was a rare merit, as men go, of knowing when he was beaten. If he had an accomplishment, it was the accomplishment of retiring defeated, with all the honors of war.

"Mercy presairve us!" he exclaimed, in the most innocent manner. "Is it even You Yersel' that writ the letter to the man ca'ed Jaffray Delamayn, and got the wee bit answer in pencil, on the blank page? Hoo, in Heeven's name, was I to know *that* was the letter ye were after when ye cam' in here? Did ye ever tell me ye were Anne Silvester, at the hottle? Never ance! Was the puir feckless husband-creature ye had

wi' ye at the inn, Jaffray Delamayn? Jaffray wad mak' twa o' him, as my ain eyes ha' seen. Gi' ye back yer letter? My certie! noo I know it *is* yer letter, I'll gi' it back wi' a' the pleasure in life!"

He opened his pocket-book, and took it out, with an alacrity worthy of the honestest man in Christendom—and (more wonderful still) he looked with a perfectly assumed expression of indifference at the five-pound note in Anne's hand.

"Hoot! toot!" he said, "I'm no' that clear in my mind that I'm free to tak' yer money. Eh, weel! well! I'll een receive it, if ye like, as a bit memento o' the time when I was o' some sma' sairvice to ye at the hottle. Ye'll no' mind," he added, suddenly returning to business, "writin' me joost a line—in the way o' receipt, ye ken—to clear me o' ony future suspicion in the matter o' the letter?"

Anne threw down the bank-note on the table near which they were standing, and snatched the letter from him.

"You need no receipt," she answered. "There shall be no letter to bear witness against you!"

She lifted her other hand to tear it in pieces. Bishopriggs caught her by both wrists, at the same moment, and held her fast.

"Bide a wee!" he said. "Ye don't get the letter, young madam, without the receipt. It may be a' the same to *you*, now ye've married the other man, whether Jaffray Delamayn ance promised ye fair in the by-gone time or no. But,

my certie! it's a matter o' some moment to *me*, that ye've chairged wi' stealin' the letter, and making a market o't, and Lord knows what besides, that I suld hae yer ain acknowledgment for it in black and white. 'Gi' me my bit receipt—and een do as ye will with yer letter after that!"

Anne's hold of the letter relaxed. She let Bishopriggs repossess himself of it as it dropped on the floor between them, without making an effort to prevent him.

"It may be a' the same to *you*, now ye've married the other man, whether Jaffray Delamayn ance promised ye fair in the by-gone time or no." Those words presented Anne's position before her in a light in which she had not seen it yet. She had truly expressed the loathing that Geoffrey now inspired in her, when she had declared in her letter to Arnold, that, even if he offered her marriage, in atonement for the past, she would rather be what she was than be his wife. It had never occurred to her, until this moment, that others would misinterpret the sensitive pride which had prompted the abandonment of her claim on the man who had ruined her. It had never been brought home to her until now, that if she left him contemptuously to go his own way, and sell himself to the first woman who had money enough to buy him, her conduct would sanction the false conclusion that she was powerless to interfere, because she was married already to another man. The color that had risen in her face vanished, and left it deadly

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pale again. She began to see that the purpose of her journey to the North was not completed yet.

“I will give you your receipt,” she said. “Tell me what to write, and it shall be written.”

Bishopriggs dictated the receipt. She wrote and signed it. He put it in his pocket-book with the five-pound note, and handed her the letter in exchange.

“Tear it if ye will,” he said. “It matters naething to *me*.”

For a moment she hesitated. A sudden shuddering shook her from head to foot—the fore-warning, it might be, of the influence which that letter, saved from destruction by a hair-breadth, was destined to exercise on her life to come. She recovered herself, and folded her cloak closer to her, as if she had felt a passing chill.

“No,” she said; “I will keep the letter.”

She folded it and put it in the pocket of her dress. Then turned to go—and stopped at the door.

“One thing more,” she added. “Do you know Mrs. Glenarm’s present address?”

“Ye’re no’ reely going to Mistress Glenarm?”

“That is no concern of yours. You can answer my question or not, as you please.”

“Eh, my leddy! yer temper’s no’ what it used to be in the auld times at the hottle. Aweel! aweel! ye ha’ gi’en me yer money, and I’ll een gi’ ye back gude measure for it, on my side. Mistress Glenarm’s awa’ in private—incog, as they

say—to Jaffray Delamayn's brither at Swanhaven Lodge. Ye may rely on the information, and it's no' that easy to come at either. They've keepit it a secret, as they think, from a' the world. Hech! hech! Tammy Pennyquick's youngest but twa is page-boy at the hoose where the leddy's been veesitin', on the outskirts o' Pairth. Keep a secret if ye can frae the pawky ears o' yer domestics in the servants' hall!—Eh! she's aff, without a word at parting!" he exclaimed as Anne left him without ceremony in the middle of his dissertation on secrets and servants' halls. "I trow I ha' gaen out for wool, and come back shorn," he added, reflecting grimly on the disastrous overthrow of the promising speculation on which he had embarked. "My certie! there was naething left for't, when madam's fingers had grippit me, but to slip through them as cannily as I could. What's Jaffray's marrying, or no' marrying, to do wi' *her*?" he wondered, reverting to the question which Anne had put to him at parting. "And whar's the sense o' her errand, if she's reely bent on finding her way to Mistress Glenarm?"

Whatever the sense of her errand might be, Anne's next proceeding proved that she was really bent on it. After resting two days, she left Perth by the first train in the morning, for Swanhaven Lodge.

NINTH SCENE.—THE MUSIC-ROOM.

CHAPTER THE FORTIETH.

JULIUS MAKES MISCHIEF.

JULIUS DELAMAYN was alone; idly sauntering to and fro, with his violin in his hand, on the terrace at Swanhaven Lodge.

The first mellow light of evening was in the sky. It was the close of the day on which Anne Silvester had left Perth.

Some hours earlier, Julius had sacrificed himself to the duties of his political position—as made for him by his father. He had submitted to the dire necessity of delivering an oration to the electors, at a public meeting in the neighboring town of Kirkandrew. A detestable atmosphere to breathe; a disorderly audience to address; insolent opposition to conciliate; imbecile inquiries to answer; brutish interruptions to endure; greedy petitioners to pacify; and dirty hands to shake: these are the stages by which the aspiring English gentleman is compelled to travel on the journey which leads him from the modest obscurity of private life to the glorious publicity of the House of Commons. Julius paid the preliminary penalties of a political first appearance, as exacted by free institutions, with the necessary patience; and returned to the wel-

come shelter of home, more indifferent, if possible, to the attractions of Parliamentary distinction than when he set out. The discord of the roaring "people" (still echoing in his ears) had sharpened his customary sensibility to the poetry of sound, as composed by Mozart, and as interpreted by piano and violin. Possessing himself of his beloved instrument, he had gone out on the terrace to cool himself in the evening air, pending the arrival of the servant whom he had summoned by the music-room bell. The man appeared at the glass door which led into the room; and reported, in answer to his master's inquiry, that Mrs. Julius Delamayn was out paying visits, and was not expected to return for another hour at least.

Julius groaned in spirit. The finest music which Mozart has written for the violin associates that instrument with the piano. Without the wife to help him, the husband was mute. After an instant's consideration, Julius hit on an idea which promised, in some degree, to remedy the disaster of Mrs. Delamayn's absence from home.

"Has Mrs. Glenarm gone out, too?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"My compliments. If Mrs. Glenarm has nothing else to do, will she be so kind as to come to me in the music-room?"

The servant went away with his message. Julius seated himself on one of the terrace benches, and began to tune his violin.

Mrs. Glenarm—rightly reported by Bishopriggs as having privately taken refuge from her

anonymous correspondent at Swanhaven Lodge—was, musically speaking, far from being an efficient substitute for Mrs. Delamayn. Julius possessed, in his wife, one of the few players on the piano-forte under whose subtle touch that shallow and soulless instrument becomes inspired with expression not its own, and produces music instead of noise. The fine organization which can work this miracle had not been bestowed on Mrs. Glenarm. She had been carefully taught; and she was to be trusted to play correctly—and that was all. Julius, hungry for music, and resigned to circumstances, asked for no more.

The servant returned with his answer. Mrs. Glenarm would join Mr. Delamayn in the music-room in ten minutes' time.

Julius rose, relieved, and resumed his sauntering walk; now playing little snatches of music; now stopping to look at the flowers on the terrace, with an eye that enjoyed their beauty, and a hand that fondled them with caressing touch. If Imperial Parliament had seen him at that moment, Imperial Parliament must have given notice of a question to his illustrious father: Is it possible, my lord, that *you* can have begotten such a Member as this?

After stopping for a moment to tighten one of the strings of his violin, Julius, raising his head from the instrument, was surprised to see a lady approaching him on the terrace. Advancing to meet her, and perceiving that she was a total stranger to him, he assumed that she was, in all probability, a visitor to his wife.

“Have I the honor of speaking to a friend of Mrs. Delamayn’s?” he asked. “My wife is not at home; I am sorry to say.”

“I am a stranger to Mrs. Delamayn,” the lady answered. “The servant informed me that she had gone out; and that I should find Mr. Delamayn here.”

Julius bowed—and waited to hear more.

“I must beg you to forgive my intrusion,” the stranger went on. “My object is to ask permission to see a lady who is, I have been informed, a guest in your house.”

The extraordinary formality of the request rather puzzled Julius.

“Do you mean Mrs. Glenarm?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Pray don’t think any permission necessary. A friend of Mrs. Glenarm’s may take her welcome for granted in this house.”

“I am not a friend of Mrs. Glenarm. I am a total stranger to her.”

This made the ceremonious request preferred by the lady a little more intelligible—but it left the lady’s object in wishing to speak to Mrs. Glenarm still in the dark. Julius politely waited, until it pleased her to proceed further, and explain herself. The explanation did not appear to be an easy one to give. Her eyes dropped to the ground. She hesitated painfully.

“My name—if I mention it,” she resumed, without looking up, “may possibly inform you—” She paused. Her color came and went. She hesitated again; struggled with her agita-

tion, and controlled it. "I am Anne Silvester," she said, suddenly raising her pale face, and suddenly steadying her trembling voice!

Julius started, and looked at her in silent surprise.

The name was doubly known to him. Not long since, he had heard it from his father's lips, at his father's bedside. Lord Holchester had charged him, had earnestly charged him, to bear that name in mind, and to help the woman who bore it, if the woman ever applied to him in time to come. Again, he had heard the name, more lately, associated scandalously with the name of his brother. On the receipt of the first of the anonymous letters sent to her, Mrs. Glenarm had not only summoned Geoffrey himself to refute the aspersion cast upon him, but had forwarded a private copy of the letter to his relatives at Swanhaven. Geoffrey's defense had not entirely satisfied Julius that his brother was free from blame. As he now looked at Anne Silvester, the doubt returned upon him strengthened—almost confirmed. Was this woman—so modest, so gentle, so simply and unaffectedly refined—the shameless adventuress denounced by Geoffrey, as claiming him on the strength of a foolish flirtation; knowing herself, at the time, to be privately married to another man? Was this woman—with the voice of a lady, the look of a lady, the manner of a lady—in league (as Geoffrey had declared) with the illiterate vagabond who was attempting to extort money anonymously from Mrs. Glenarm? Impossible!

Making every allowance for the proverbial deceitfulness of appearances, impossible!

“Your name has been mentioned to me,” said Julius, answering her after a momentary pause. His instincts, as a gentleman, made him shrink from referring to the association of her name with the name of his brother. “My father mentioned you,” he added, considerably explaining his knowledge of her in *that* way, “when I last saw him in London.”

“Your father!” She came a step nearer, with a look of distrust as well as a look of astonishment in her face. “Your father is Lord Holchester—is he not?”

“Yes.”

“What made him speak of *me*?”

“He was ill at the time,” Julius answered. “And he had been thinking of events in his past life with which I am entirely unacquainted. He said he had known your father and mother. He desired me, if you were ever in want of any assistance, to place my services at your disposal. When he expressed that wish, he spoke very earnestly—he gave me the impression that there was a feeling of regret associated with the recollections on which he had been dwelling.”

Slowly, and in silence, Anne drew back to the low wall of the terrace close by. She rested one hand on it to support herself. Julius had said words of terrible import without a suspicion of what he had done. Never until now had Anne Silvester known that the man who had betrayed her was the son of that other man whose discov-

ery of the flaw in the marriage had ended in the betrayal of her mother before her. She felt the shock of the revelation with a chill of superstitious dread. Was the chain of a fatality wound invisibly round her? Turn which way she might, was she still going darkly on, in the track of her dead mother, to an appointed and hereditary doom? Present things passed from her view as the awful doubt cast its shadow over her mind. She lived again for a moment in the time when she was a child. She saw the face of her mother once more, with the wan despair on it of the bygone days when the title of wife was denied her, and the social prospect was closed forever.

Julius approached, and roused her.

“Can I get you anything?” he asked. “You are looking very ill. I hope I have said nothing to distress you?”

The question failed to attract her attention. She put a question herself instead of answering it.

“Did you say you were quite ignorant of what your father was thinking of when he spoke to you about me?”

“Quite ignorant.”

“Is your brother likely to know more about it than you do?”

“Certainly not.”

She paused, absorbed once more in her own thoughts. Startled, on the memorable day when they had first met, by Geoffrey's family name, she had put the question to him whether there had not been some acquaintance between their

parents in the past time. Deceiving her in all else, he had not deceived in this. He had spoken in good faith, when he had declared that he had never heard her father or mother mentioned at home.

The curiosity of Julius was aroused. He attempted to lead her on into saying more.

“You appear to know what my father was thinking of when he spoke to me,” he resumed. “May I ask—”

She interrupted him with a gesture of entreaty.

“Pray don’t ask! It’s past and over—it can have no interest for you—it has nothing to do with my errand here. I must return,” she went on, hurriedly, “to my object in trespassing on your kindness. Have you heard me mentioned, Mr. Delamayn, by another member of your family besides your father?”

Julius had not anticipated that she would approach, of her own accord, the painful subject on which he had himself forborne to touch. He was a little disappointed. He had expected more delicacy of feeling from her than she had shown.

“Is it necessary,” he asked, coldly, “to enter on that?”

The blood rose again in Anne’s cheeks.

“If it had not been necessary,” she answered, “do you think I could have forced myself to mention it to *you*? Let me remind you that I am here on sufferance. If I don’t speak plainly (no matter at what sacrifice to my own feelings), I make my situation more embarrassing than it

is already. I have something to tell Mrs. Glenarm relating to the anonymous letters which she has lately received. And I have a word to say to her, next, about her contemplated marriage. Before you allow me to do this, you ought to know who I am. (I have owned it.) You ought to have heard the worst that can be said of my conduct. (Your face tells me you have heard the worst.) After the forbearance you have shown to me, as a perfect stranger, I will not commit the meanness of taking you by surprise. Perhaps, Mr. Delamayn, you understand, *now*, why I felt myself obliged to refer to your brother. Will you trust me with permission to speak to Mrs. Glenarm?"

It was simply and modestly said—with an unaffected and touching resignation of look and manner. Julius gave her back the respect and the sympathy which, for a moment, he had unjustly withheld from her.

"You have placed a confidence in me," he said, "which most persons in your situation would have withheld. I feel bound, in return, to place confidence in you. I will take it for granted that your motive in this matter is one which it is my duty to respect. It will be for Mrs. Glenarm to say whether she wishes the interview to take place or not. All that I can do is to leave you free to propose it to her. You *are* free."

As he spoke, the sound of the piano reached them from the music-room. Julius pointed to the glass door which opened on to the terrace.

“You have only to go in by that door,” he said, “and you will find Mrs. Glenarm alone.”

Anne bowed, and left him. Arrived at the short flight of steps which led up to the door, she paused to collect her thoughts before she went in.

A sudden reluctance to go on and enter the room took possession of her, as she waited with her foot on the lower step. The report of Mrs. Glenarm's contemplated marriage had produced no such effect on her as Sir Patrick had supposed: it had found no love for Geoffrey left to wound, no latent jealousy only waiting to be inflamed. Her object in taking the journey to Perth was completed when her correspondence with Geoffrey was in her own hands again. The change of purpose which had brought her to Swanhaven was due entirely to the new view of her position toward Mrs. Glenarm which the coarse common-sense of Bishopriggs had first suggested to her. If she failed to protest against Mrs. Glenarm's marriage, in the interests of the reparation which Geoffrey owed to her, her conduct would only confirm Geoffrey's audacious assertion that she was a married woman already. For her own sake she might still have hesitated to move in the matter. But Blanche's interests were concerned as well as her own; and, for Blanche's sake, she had resolved on making the journey to Swanhaven Lodge.

At the same time, feeling toward Geoffrey as she felt now—conscious that she was of not

really desiring the reparation on which she was about to insist—it was essential to the preservation of her own self-respect that she should have some purpose in view which could justify her to her own conscience in assuming the character of Mrs. Glenarm's rival.

She had only to call to mind the critical situation of Blanche—and to see her purpose before her plainly. Assuming that she could open the coming interview by peaceably proving that her claim on Geoffrey was beyond dispute, she might then, without fear of misconception, take the tone of a friend instead of an enemy, and might, with the best grace, assure Mrs. Glenarm that she had no rivalry to dread, on the one easy condition that she engaged to make Geoffrey repair the evil that he had done. “Marry him without a word against it to dread from *me*—so long as he unsays the words and undoes the deeds which have thrown a doubt on the marriage of Arnold and Blanche.” If she could but bring the interview to this end—there was the way found of extricating Arnold, by her own exertions, from the false position in which she had innocently placed him toward his wife! Such was the object before her, as she now stood on the brink of her interview with Mrs. Glenarm.

Up to this moment, she had firmly believed in her capacity to realize her own visionary project. It was only when she had her foot on the step that a doubt of the success of the coming experiment crossed her mind. For the first time she saw the weak point in her own reasoning. For

the first time she felt how much she had blindly taken for granted, in assuming that Mrs. Glenarm would have sufficient sense of justice and sufficient command of temper to hear her patiently. All her hopes of success rested on her own favorable estimate of a woman who was a total stranger to her! What if the first words exchanged between them proved the estimate to be wrong?

It was too late to pause and reconsider the position. Julius Delamayn had noticed her hesitation, and was advancing toward her from the end of the terrace. There was no help for it but to master her own irresolution, and to run the risk boldly. "Come what may, I have gone too far to stop *here*." With that desperate resolution to animate her, she opened the glass door at the top of the steps, and went into the room.

Mrs. Glenarm rose from the piano. The two women—one so richly, the other so plainly dressed; one with her beauty in its full bloom, the other worn and blighted; one with society at her feet, the other an outcast living under the bleak shadow of reproach—the two women stood face to face, and exchanged the cold courtesies of salute between strangers, in silence.

The first to meet the trivial necessities of the situation was Mrs. Glenarm. She good-humoredly put an end to the embarrassment—which the shy visitor appeared to feel acutely—by speaking first.

"I am afraid the servants have not told you?" she said. "Mrs. Delamayn has gone out."

“I beg your pardon—I have not called to see Mrs. Delamayn.”

Mrs. Glenarm looked a little surprised. She went on, however, as amiably as before.

“Mr. Delamayn, perhaps?” she suggested. “I expect him here every moment.”

Anne explained again. “I have just parted from Mr. Delamayn.” Mrs. Glenarm opened her eyes in astonishment. Anne proceeded. “I have come here, if you will excuse the intrusion—”

She hesitated—at a loss how to end the sentence. Mrs. Glenarm, beginning by this time to feel a strong curiosity as to what might be coming next, advanced to the rescue once more.

“Pray don’t apologize,” she said. “I think I understand that you are so good as to have come to see *me*. You look tired. Won’t you take a chair?”

Anne could stand no longer. She took the offered chair. Mrs. Glenarm resumed her place on the music-stool, and ran her fingers idly over the keys of the piano. “Where did you see Mr. Delamayn?” she went on. “The most irresponsible of men, except when he has got his fiddle in his hand! Is he coming in soon? Are we going to have any music? Have you come to play with us? Mr. Delamayn is a perfect fanatic in music, isn’t he? Why isn’t he here to introduce us? I suppose you like the classical style, too? Did you know that I was in the music-room? Might I ask your name?”

Frivolous as they were, Mrs. Glenarm’s ques-

tions were not without their use. They gave Anne time to summon her resolution, and to feel the necessity of explaining herself.

“I am speaking, I believe, to Mrs. Glenarm?” she began.

The good-humored widow smiled, and bowed graciously.

“I have come here, Mrs. Glenarm—by Mr. Delamayn’s permission—to ask leave to speak to you on a matter in which you are interested.”

Mrs. Glenarm’s many-ringed fingers paused over the keys of the piano. Mrs. Glenarm’s plump face turned on the stranger with a dawning expression of surprise.

“Indeed? I am interested in so many matters. May I ask what *this* matter is?”

The flippant tone of the speaker jarred on Anne. If Mrs. Glenarm’s nature was as shallow as it appeared to be on the surface, there was little hope of any sympathy establishing itself between them.

“I wished to speak to you,” she answered, “about something that happened while you were paying a visit in the neighborhood of Perth.”

The dawning surprise in Mrs. Glenarm’s face became intensified into an expression of distrust. Her hearty manner vanished under a veil of conventional civility, drawn over it suddenly. She looked at Anne. “Never at the best of times a beauty,” she thought. “Wretchedly out of health now. Dressed like a servant, and looking like a lady. What *does* it mean?”

The last doubt was not to be borne in silence

by a person of Mrs. Glenarm's temperament. She addressed herself to the solution of it with the most unblushing directness—dexterously excused by the most winning frankness of manner.

“Pardon me,” she said. “My memory for faces is a bad one; and I don't think you heard me just now, when I asked for your name. Have we ever met before?”

“Never.”

“And yet—if I understand what you are referring to—you wish to speak to me about something which is only interesting to myself and my most intimate friends.”

“You understand me quite correctly,” said Anne. “I wish to speak to you about some anonymous letters—”

“For the third time, will you permit me to ask for your name?”

“You shall hear it directly—if you will first allow me to finish what I wanted to say. I wish—if I can—to persuade you that I come here as a friend, before I mention my name. You will, I am sure, not be very sorry to hear that you need dread no further annoyance—”

“Pardon me once more,” said Mrs. Glenarm, interposing for the second time. “I am at a loss to know to what I am to attribute this kind interest in my affairs on the part of a total stranger.”

This time her tone was more than politely cold—it was politely impertinent. Mrs. Glenarm had lived all her life in good society, and was a perfect mistress of the subtleties of refined inso-

lence in her intercourse with those who incurred her displeasure.

Anne's sensitive nature felt the wound—but Anne's patient courage submitted. She put away from her the insolence which had tried to sting, and went on, gently and firmly, as if nothing had happened.

"The person who wrote to you anonymously," she said, "alluded to a correspondence. He is no longer in possession of it. The correspondence has passed into hands which may be trusted to respect it. It will be put to no base use in the future—I answer for that."

"You answer for that?" repeated Mrs. Glenarm. She suddenly leaned forward over the piano, and fixed her eyes in unconcealed scrutiny on Anne's face. The violent temper, so often found in combination with the weak nature, began to show itself in her rising color and her lowering brow. "How do *you* know what the person wrote?" she asked. "How do *you* know that the correspondence has passed into other hands? Who are you?" Before Anne could answer, she sprang to her feet, electrified by a new idea. "The man who wrote to me spoke of something else besides a correspondence. He spoke of a woman. I have found you out!" she exclaimed, with a burst of jealous fury. "*You* are the woman!"

Anne rose, on her side, still in firm possession of her self-control.

"Mrs. Glenarm," she said, calmly, "I warn—no, I entreat you—not to take that tone with

me. Compose yourself; and I promise to satisfy you that you are more interested than you are willing to believe in what I have still to say. Pray bear with me for a little longer. I admit that you have guessed right. I own that I am the miserable woman who has been ruined and deserted by Geoffrey Delamayn."

"It's false!" cried Mrs. Glenarm. "You wretch! Do you come to *me* with your trumped-up story? What does Julius Delamayn mean by exposing me to this?" Her indignation at finding herself in the same room with Anne broke its way through, not the restraints only, but the common decencies of politeness. "I'll ring for the servants!" she said. "I'll have you turned out of the house."

She tried to cross the fireplace to ring the bell. Anne, who was standing nearest to it, stepped forward at the same moment. Without saying a word, she motioned with her hand to the other woman to stand back. There was a pause. The two waited, with their eyes steadily fixed on one another—each with her resolution laid bare to the other's view. In a moment more, the finer nature prevailed. Mrs. Glenarm drew back a step in silence.

"Listen to me," said Anne.

"Listen to you?" repeated Mrs. Glenarm. "You have no right to be in this house. You have no right to force yourself in here. Leave the room!"

Anne's patience—so firmly and admirably preserved thus far—began to fail her at last.

“Take care, Mrs. Glenarm!” she said, still struggling with herself. “I am not naturally a patient woman. Trouble has done much to tame my temper—but endurance has its limits. You have reached the limits of mine. I have a claim to be heard—and after what you have said to me, I *will* be heard!”

“You have no claim! You shameless woman, you are married already. I know the man’s name. Arnold Brinkworth.”

“Did Geoffrey Delamayn tell you that?”

“I decline to answer a woman who speaks of Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn in that familiar way.”

Anne advanced a step nearer.

“Did Geoffrey Delamayn tell you that?” she repeated.

There was a light in her eyes, there was a ring in her voice, which showed that she was roused at last. Mrs. Glenarm answered her this time.

“He did tell me.”

“He lied!”

“He did *not*! He knew. I believe *him*. I don’t believe *you*.”

“If he told you that I was anything but a single woman—if he told you that Arnold Brinkworth was married to anybody but Miss Lundie of Windygates—I say again he lied!”

“I say again—I believe *him*, and not *you*.”

“You believe I am Arnold Brinkworth’s wife?”

“I am certain of it.”

“You tell me that to my face?”

“I tell you to your face—you *may* have been

Geoffrey Delamayn's mistress; you *are* Arnold Brinkworth's wife."

At those words the long-restrained anger leaped up in Anne—all the more hotly for having been hitherto so steadily controlled. In one breathless moment the whirlwind of her indignation swept away, not only all remembrance of the purpose which had brought her to Swanhaven, but all sense even of the unpardonable wrong which she had suffered at Geoffrey's hands. If he had been there at that moment, and had offered to redeem his pledge, she would have consented to marry him, while Mrs. Glenarm's eye was on her—no matter whether she destroyed herself in her first cool moment afterward or not. The small sting had planted itself at last in the great nature. The noblest woman is only a woman, after all!

"I forbid your marriage to Geoffrey Delamayn! I insist on his performing the promise he gave me, to make me his wife! I have got it here in his own words, in his own writing. On his soul, he swears it to me—he will redeem his pledge. His mistress, did you say? His wife, Mrs. Glenarm, before the week is out!"

In those wild words she cast back the taunt—with the letter held in triumph in her hand.

Daunted for the moment by the doubt now literally forced on her, that Anne might really have the claim on Geoffrey which she advanced, Mrs. Glenarm answered nevertheless with the obstinacy of a woman brought to bay—with a



FOR AN INSTANT THEY FACED EACH OTHER.

—Man and Wife, Vol. Four, page 53.

resolution not to be convinced by conviction itself.

“I won’t give him up!” she cried. “Your letter is a forgery. You have no proof. I won’t, I won’t, I won’t give him up!” she repeated, with the impotent iteration of an angry child.

Anne pointed disdainfully to the letter that she held. “Here is his pledged and written word,” she said. “While I live, you will never be his wife.”

“I shall be his wife the day after the race. I am going to him in London—to warn him against You!”

“You will find me in London before you—with this in my hand. Do you know his writing?”

She held up the letter, open. Mrs. Glenarm’s hand flew out with the stealthy rapidity of a cat’s paw, to seize and destroy it. Quick as she was, her rival was quicker still. For an instant they faced each other breathless—one with the letter held behind her; one with her hand still stretched out.

At the same moment—before a word more had passed between them—the glass door opened; and Julius Delamayn appeared in the room.

He addressed himself to Anne.

“We decided, on the terrace,” he said, quietly, “that you should speak to Mrs. Glenarm, if Mrs. Glenarm wished it. Do you think it desirable that the interview should be continued any longer?”

Anne’s head drooped on her breast. The fiery anger in her was quenched in an instant.

"I have been cruelly provoked, Mr. Delamayn," she answered. "But I have no right to plead that." She looked up at him for a moment. The hot tears of shame gathered in her eyes and fell slowly over her cheeks. She bent her head again and hid them from him. "The only atonement I can make," she said, "is to ask your pardon, and to leave the house."

In silence, she turned away to the door. In silence, Julius Delamayn paid her the trifling courtesy of opening it for her. She went out.

Mrs. Glenarm's indignation—suspended for the moment—transferred itself to Julius.

"If I have been entrapped into seeing that woman, with your approval," she said, haughtily, "I owe it to myself, Mr. Delamayn, to follow her example, and to leave your house."

"I authorized her to ask you for an interview, Mrs. Glenarm. If she has presumed on the permission that I gave her, I sincerely regret it, and I beg you to accept my apologies. At the same time, I may venture to add, in defense of my conduct, that I thought her—and think her still—a woman to be pitied more than to be blamed."

"To be pitied—did you say?" asked Mrs. Glenarm, doubtful whether her ears had not deceived her.

"To be pitied," repeated Julius.

"You may find it convenient, Mr. Delamayn, to forget what your brother has told us about that person. I happen to remember it."

"So do I, Mrs. Glenarm. But, with my ex-

perience of Geoffrey—” He hesitated, and ran his fingers nervously over the strings of his violin.

“You don’t believe him?” said Mrs. Glenarm.

Julius declined to admit that he doubted his brother’s word, to the lady who was about to become his brother’s wife.

“I don’t quite go that length,” he said. “I find it difficult to reconcile what Geoffrey has told us, with Miss Silvester’s manner and appearance—”

“Her appearance!” cried Mrs. Glenarm, in a transport of astonishment and disgust. “*Her* appearance! Oh, the men! I beg your pardon—I ought to have remembered that there is no accounting for tastes. Go on—pray go on!”

“Shall we compose ourselves with a little music?” suggested Julius.

“I particularly request you will go on,” answered Mrs. Glenarm, emphatically. “You find it ‘impossible to reconcile—’”

“I said ‘difficult.’”

“Oh, very well. Difficult to reconcile what Geoffrey told us, with Miss Silvester’s manner and appearance. What next? You had something else to say, when I was so rude as to interrupt you. What was it?”

“Only this,” said Julius. “I don’t find it easy to understand Sir Patrick Lundie’s conduct in permitting Mr. Brinkworth to commit bigamy with his niece.”

“Wait a minute! The marriage of that hor-

rible woman to Mr. Brinkworth was a private marriage. Of course, Sir Patrick knew nothing about it!"

Julius owned that this might be possible, and made a second attempt to lead the angry lady back to the piano. Useless, once more! Though she shrank from confessing it to herself, Mrs. Glenarm's belief in the genuineness of her lover's defense had been shaken. The tone taken by Julius—moderate as it was—revived the first startling suspicion of the credibility of Geoffrey's statement which Anne's language and conduct had forced on Mrs. Glenarm. She dropped into the nearest chair, and put her handkerchief to her eyes. "You always hated poor Geoffrey," she said, with a burst of tears. "And now you're defaming him to me!"

Julius managed her admirably. On the point of answering her seriously, he checked himself. "I always hated poor Geoffrey?" he repeated, with a smile. "You ought to be the last person to say that, Mrs. Glenarm! I brought him all the way from London expressly to introduce him to *you*."

"Then I wish you had left him in London!" retorted Mrs. Glenarm, shifting suddenly from tears to temper. "I was a happy woman before I met your brother. I can't give him up!" she burst out, shifting back again from temper to tears. "I don't care if he *has* deceived me. I won't let another woman have him! I *will* be his wife!" She threw herself theatrically on her knees before Julius. "Oh, *do* help me to find

out the truth!" she said. "Oh, Julius, pity me! I am so fond of him!"

There was genuine distress in her face, there was true feeling in her voice. Who would have believed that there were reserves of merciless insolence and heartless cruelty in this woman, and that they had been lavishly poured out on a fallen sister not five minutes since?

"I will do all I can," said Julius, raising her. "Let us talk of it when you are more composed. Try a little music," he repeated, "just to quiet your nerves."

"Would *you* like me to play?" asked Mrs. Glenarm, becoming a model of feminine docility at a moment's notice.

Julius opened the Sonatas of Mozart, and shouldered his violin.

"Let's try the Fifteenth," he said, placing Mrs. Glenarm at the piano. "We will begin with the Adagio. If ever there was divine music written by mortal man, there it is!"

They began. At the third bar Mrs. Glenarm dropped a note—and the bow of Julius paused shuddering on the strings.

"I can't play!" she said. "I am so agitated; I am so anxious. How *am* I to find out whether that wretch is really married or not? Who can I ask? I can't go to Geoffrey in London—the trainers won't let me see him. I can't appeal to Mr. Brinkworth himself—I am not even acquainted with him. Who else is there? Do think, and tell me!"

There was but one chance of making her re-

turn to the Adagio—the chance of hitting on a suggestion which would satisfy and quiet her. Julius laid his violin on the piano, and considered the question before him carefully.

“There are the witnesses,” he said. “If Geoffrey’s story is to be depended on, the landlady and the waiter at the inn can speak to the facts.”

“Low people!” objected Mrs. Glenarm. “People I don’t know. People who might take advantage of my situation, and be insolent to me.”

Julius considered once more; and made another suggestion. With the fatal ingenuity of innocence, he hit on the idea of referring Mrs. Glenarm to no less a person than Lady Lundie herself!

“There is our good friend at Windygates,” he said. “Some whisper of the matter may have reached Lady Lundie’s ears. It may be a little awkward to call on her (if she *has* heard anything) at the time of a serious family disaster. You are the best judge of that, however. All I can do is to throw out the notion. Windygates isn’t very far off—and something might come of it. What do you think?”

Something might come of it! Let it be remembered that Lady Lundie had been left entirely in the dark—that she had written to Sir Patrick in a tone which plainly showed that her self-esteem was wounded and her suspicion roused—and that her first intimation of the serious dilemma in which Arnold Brinkworth stood was now likely, thanks to Julius Delamayn, to

reach her from the lips of a mere acquaintance. Let this be remembered; and then let the estimate be formed of what might come of it—not at Windygates only, but also at Ham Farm!

“What do you think?” asked Julius.

Mrs. Glenarm was enchanted. “The very person to go to!” she said. “If I am not let in, I can easily write—and explain my object as an apology. Lady Lundie is so right-minded, so sympathetic. If she sees no one else—I have only to confide my anxieties to her, and I am surè she will see me. You will lend me a carriage, won’t you? I’ll go to Windygates to-morrow.

Julius took his violin off the piano.

“Don’t think me very troublesome,” he said, coaxingly. “Between this and to-morrow we have nothing to do. And it is *such* music, if you once get into the swing of it! Would you mind trying again?”

Mrs. Glenarm was willing to do anything to prove her gratitude, after the invaluable hint which she had just received. At the second trial the fair pianist’s eye and hand were in perfect harmony. The lovely melody which the Adagio of Mozart’s Fifteenth Sonata has given to violin and piano flowed smoothly at last—and Julius Delamayn soared to the seventh heaven of musical delight.

The next day Mrs. Glenarm and Mrs. Delamayn went together to Windygates House.

TENTH SCENE.—THE BEDROOM.

CHAPTER THE FORTY-FIRST.

LADY LUNDIE DOES HER DUTY.

THE scene opens on a bedroom—and discloses, in broad daylight, a lady in bed.

Persons with an irritable sense of propriety, whose self-appointed duty it is to be always crying out, are warned to pause before they cry out on this occasion. The lady now presented to view being no less a person than Lady Lundie herself, it follows, as a matter of course, that the utmost demands of propriety are, by the mere assertion of that fact, abundantly and indisputably satisfied. To say that anything short of direct moral advantage could, by any possibility, accrue to any living creature by the presentation of her ladyship in a horizontal, instead of a perpendicular position, is to assert that Virtue is a question of posture, and that Respectability ceases to assert itself when it ceases to appear in morning or evening dress. Will anybody be bold enough to say that? Let nobody cry out, then, on the present occasion.

Lady Lundie was in bed.

Her ladyship had received Blanche's written announcement of the sudden stoppage of the

bridal tour; and had penned the answer to Sir Patrick—the receipt of which at Ham Farm has been already described. This done, Lady Lundie felt it due to herself to take a becoming position in her own house, pending the possible arrival of Sir Patrick's reply. What does a right minded woman do when she has reason to believe that she is cruelly distrusted by the members of her own family? A right minded woman feels it so acutely that she falls ill. Lady Lundie fell ill accordingly.

The case being a serious one, a medical practitioner of the highest grade in the profession was required to treat it. A physician from the neighboring town of Kirkandrew was called in.

The physician came in a carriage and pair, with the necessary bald head, and the indispensable white cravat. He felt her ladyship's pulse, and put a few gentle questions. He turned his back solemnly, as only a great doctor can, on his own positive internal conviction that his patient had nothing whatever the matter with her. He said, with every appearance of believing in himself, "Nerves, Lady Lundie. Repose in bed is essentially necessary. I will write a prescription." He prescribed with perfect gravity: Aromatic Spirits of Ammonia—15 drops. Spirits of Red Lavender—10 drops. Syrup of Orange Peel—2 drams. Camphor Julep—1 ounce. When he had written, *Misce fiat Haustus* (instead of *Mix a Draught*)—when he had added, *Ter die Sumendus* (instead of *To be taken Three times a day*)—and when he had certified to his own

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Latin, by putting his initials at the end, he had only to make his bow; to slip two guineas into his pocket; and to go his way, with an approving professional conscience, in the character of a physician who had done his duty.

Lady Lundie was in bed. The visible part of her ladyship was perfectly attired, with a view to the occasion. A fillet of superb white lace encircled her head. She wore an adorable invalid jacket of white cambric, trimmed with lace and pink ribbons. The rest was—bed-clothes. On a table at her side stood the Red Lavender Draught—in color soothing to the eye; in flavor not unpleasant to the taste. A book of devotional character was near it. The domestic ledgers, and the kitchen report for the day, were ranged modestly behind the devout book. (Not even her ladyship's nerves, observe, were permitted to interfere with her ladyship's duty.) A fan, a smelling-bottle, and a handkerchief lay within reach on the counterpane. The spacious room was partially darkened. One of the lower windows was open, affording her ladyship the necessary cubic supply of air. The late Sir Thomas looked at his widow, in effigy, from the wall opposite the end of the bed. Not a chair was out of its place; not a vestige of wearing apparel dared to show itself outside the sacred limits of the wardrobe and the drawers. The sparkling treasures of the toilet-table glittered in the dim distance. The jugs and basins were of a rare and creamy white; spotless and beautiful to see. Look where you might, you saw a

perfect room. Then look at the bed—and you saw a perfect woman, and completed the picture.

It was the day after Anne's appearance at Swanhaven—toward the end of the afternoon.

Lady Lundie's own maid opened the door noiselessly, and stole on tip-toe to the bedside. Her ladyship's eyes were closed. Her ladyship suddenly opened them.

“Not asleep, Hopkins. Suffering. What is it?”

Hopkins laid two cards on the counterpane.

“Mrs. Delamayn, my lady—and Mrs. Glenarm.”

“They were told I was ill, of course?”

“Yes, my lady. Mrs. Glenarm sent for me. She went into the library, and wrote this note.”

Hopkins produced the note, neatly folded in three-cornered form.

“Have they gone?”

“No, my lady. Mrs. Glenarm told me Yes or No would do for answer, if you could only have the goodness to read this.”

“Thoughtless of Mrs. Glenarm—at a time when the doctor insists on perfect repose,” said Lady Lundie. “It doesn't matter. One sacrifice more or less is of very little consequence.”

She fortified herself by an application of the smelling-bottle, and opened the note. It ran thus:

“So grieved, dear Lady Lundie, to hear that you are a prisoner in your room! I had taken the opportunity of calling with Mrs. Delamayn, in the hope that I might be able to ask you a question. Will your inexhaustible kindness for-

give me if I ask it in writing? Have you had any unexpected news of Mr. Arnold Brinkworth lately? I mean, have you heard anything about him which has taken you very much by surprise? I have a serious reason for asking this. I will tell you what it is, the moment you are able to see me. Until then, one word of answer is all I expect. Send word down—Yes, or No. A thousand apologies—and pray get better soon!”

The singular question contained in this note suggested one of two inferences to Lady Lundie's mind. Either Mrs. Glenarm had heard a report of the unexpected return of the married couple to England—or she was in the far more interesting and important position of possessing a clew to the secret of what was going on under the surface at Ham Farm. The phrase used in the note, “I have a serious reason for asking this,” appeared to favor the latter of the two interpretations. Impossible as it seemed to be that Mrs. Glenarm could know something about Arnold of which Lady Lundie was in absolute ignorance, her ladyship's curiosity (already powerfully excited by Blanche's mysterious letter) was only to be quieted by obtaining the necessary explanation forthwith, at a personal interview.

“Hopkins,” she said, “I must see Mrs. Glenarm.”

Hopkins respectfully held up her hands in horror. Company in the bedroom in the present state of her ladyship's health!

“A matter of duty is involved in this, Hopkins. Give me the glass.”

Hopkins produced an elegant little hand-mirror. Lady Lundie carefully surveyed herself in it down to the margin of the bed-clothes. Above criticism in every respect? Yes—even when the critic was a woman.

“Show Mrs. Glenarm up here.”

In a minute or two more the iron-master’s widow fluttered into the room—a little overdressed as usual; and a little profuse in expressions of gratitude for her ladyship’s kindness, and of anxiety about her ladyship’s health. Lady Lundie endured it as long as she could—then stopped it with a gesture of polite remonstrance, and came to the point.

“Now, my dear—about this question in your note? Is it possible you have heard already that Arnold Brinkworth and his wife have come back from Baden?” Mrs. Glenarm opened her eyes in astonishment. Lady Lundie put it more plainly. “They were to have gone on to Switzerland, you know, for their wedding tour, and they suddenly altered their minds, and came back to England on Sunday last.”

“Dear Lady Lundie, it’s not that! Have you heard nothing about Mr. Brinkworth except what you have just told me?”

“Nothing.”

There was a pause. Mrs. Glenarm toyed hesitatingly with her parasol. Lady Lundie leaned forward in the bed, and looked at her attentively.

“What have *you* heard about him?” she asked.

Mrs. Glenarm was embarrassed. "It's so difficult to say," she began.

"I can bear anything but suspense," said Lady Lundie. "Tell me the worst."

Mrs. Glenarm decided to risk it. "Have you never heard," she asked, "that Mr. Brinkworth might possibly have committed himself with another lady before he married Miss Lundie?"

Her ladyship first closed her eyes in horror, and then searched blindly on the counterpane for the smelling-bottle. Mrs. Glenarm gave it to her, and waited to see how the invalid bore it before she said any more.

"There are things one *must* hear," remarked Lady Lundie. "I see an act of duty involved in this. No words can describe how you astonish me. Who told you?"

"Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn told me."

Her ladyship applied for the second time to the smelling-bottle. "Arnold Brinkworth's most intimate friend!" she exclaimed. "He ought to know if anybody does. This is dreadful. Why should Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn tell *you*?"

"I am going to marry him," answered Mrs. Glenarm. "That is my excuse, dear Lady Lundie, for troubling you in this matter."

Lady Lundie partially opened her eyes in a state of faint bewilderment. "I don't understand," she said. "For Heaven's sake explain yourself!"

"Haven't you heard about the anonymous letters?" asked Mrs. Glenarm.

Yes. Lady Lundie had heard about the letters. But only what the public in general had heard. The name of the lady in the background not mentioned; and Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn assumed to be as innocent as the babe unborn. Any mistake in that assumption? "Give me your hand, my poor dear, and confide it all to me!"

"He is not quite innocent," said Mrs. Glenarm. "He owned to a foolish flirtation—all *her* doing, no doubt. Of course, I insisted on a distinct explanation. Had she really any claim on him? Not the shadow of a claim. I felt that I only had his word for that—and I told him so. He said he could prove it—he said he knew her to be privately married already. Her husband had disowned and deserted her; she was at the end of her resources; she was desperate enough to attempt anything. I thought it all very suspicious—until Geoffrey mentioned the man's name. *That* certainly proved that he had cast off his wife; for I myself knew that he had lately married another person."

Lady Lundie suddenly started up from her pillow—honestly agitated; genuinely alarmed by this time.

"Mr. Delamayn told you the man's name?" she said, breathlessly.

"Yes."

"Do I know it?"

"Don't ask me."

Lady Lundie fell back on the pillow.

Mrs. Glenarm rose to ring for help. Before

she could touch the bell, her ladyship had rallied again.

“Stop!” she cried. “I can confirm it! It’s true, Mrs. Glenarm! it’s true! Open the silver box on the toilet-table—you will find the key in it. Bring me the top letter. Here! Look at it! I got this from Blanche. Why have they suddenly given up their bridal tour? Why have they gone back to Sir Patrick at Ham Farm? Why have they put me off with an infamous subterfuge to account for it? I felt sure something dreadful had happened. Now I know what it is!” She sank back again, with closed eyes, and repeated the words, in a fierce whisper, to herself. “Now I know what it is!”

Mrs. Glenarm read the letter. The reason given for the suspiciously-sudden return of the bride and bridegroom was palpably a subterfuge—and, more remarkable still, the name of Anne Silvester was connected with it. Mrs. Glenarm became strongly agitated on her side.

“This *is* a confirmation,” she said. “Mr. Brinkworth has been found out—the woman *is* married to him—Geoffrey is free. Oh, my dear friend, what a load of anxiety you have taken off my mind! That vile wretch—”

Lady Lundie suddenly opened her eyes.

“Do you mean,” she asked, “the woman who is at the bottom of all the mischief?”

“Yes. I saw her yesterday. She forced herself in at Swanhaven. She called him Geoffrey Delamayn. She declared herself a single woman. She claimed him before my face in the most

audacious manner. She shook my faith, Lady Lundie—she shook my faith in Geoffrey!”

“Who is she?”

“Who?” echoed Mrs. Glenarm. “Don’t you even know that? Why, her name is repeated half a dozen times in this letter!”

Lady Lundie uttered a scream that rang through the room. Mrs. Glenarm started to her feet. The maid appeared at the door in terror. Her ladyship motioned to the woman to withdraw again instantly, and then pointed to Mrs. Glenarm’s chair.

“Sit down,” she said. “Let me have a minute or two of quiet. I want nothing more.”

The silence in the room was unbroken until Lady Lundie spoke again. She asked for Blanche’s letter. After reading it carefully, she laid it aside, and fell for a while into deep thought.

“I have done Blanche an injustice!” she exclaimed. “My poor Blanche!”

“You think she knows nothing about it?”

“I am certain of it! You forget, Mrs. Glenarm, that this horrible discovery casts a doubt on my stepdaughter’s marriage. Do you think, if she knew the truth, she would write of a wretch who has mortally injured her as she writes here? They have put her off with the excuse that she innocently sends to *me*. I see it as plainly as I see you! Mr. Brinkworth and Sir Patrick are in league to keep us both in the dark. Dear child! I owe her an atonement. If

nobody else opens her eyes, I will do it. Sir Patrick shall find that Blanche has a friend in Me!”

A smile—the dangerous smile of an inveterately vindictive woman thoroughly roused—showed itself with a furtive suddenness on her face. Mrs. Glenarm was a little startled. Lady Lundie below the surface—as distinguished from Lady Lundie *on* the surface—was not a pleasant object to contemplate.

“Pray try to compose yourself,” said Mrs. Glenarm. “Dear Lady Lundie, you frighten me!”

The bland surface of her ladyship appeared smoothly once more; drawn back, as it were, over the hidden inner self, which it had left for the moment exposed to view.

“Forgive me for feeling it!” she said, with the patient sweetness which so eminently distinguished her in times of trial. “It falls a little heavily on a poor sick woman—innocent of all suspicion and insulted by the most heartless neglect. Don’t let me distress you. I shall rally, my dear; I shall rally! In this dreadful calamity—this abyss of crime and misery and deceit—I have no one to depend on but myself. For Blanche’s sake, the whole thing must be cleared up—probed, my dear, probed to the depths. Blanche must take a position that is worthy of her. Blanche must insist on her rights, under My protection. Never mind what I suffer, or what I sacrifice. There is a work of justice for poor weak Me to do. It shall be done!” said

her ladyship, fanning herself with an aspect of illimitable resolution. "It shall be done!"

"But, Lady Lundie, what can you do? They are all away in the South. And as for that abominable woman—"

Lady Lundie touched Mrs. Glenarm on the shoulder with her fan.

"I have my surprise in store, dear friend, as well as you. That abominable woman was employed as Blanche's governess in this house. Wait! that is not all. She left us suddenly—ran away—on the pretense of being privately married. I know where she went. I can trace what she did. I can find out who was with her. I can follow Mr. Brinkworth's proceedings, behind Mr. Brinkworth's back. I can search out the truth, without depending on people compromised in this black business, whose interest it is to deceive me. And I will do it to-day!" She closed the fan with a sharp snap of triumph, and settled herself on the pillow in placid enjoyment of her dear friend's surprise.

Mrs. Glenarm drew confidentially closer to the bedside. "How can you manage it?" she asked, eagerly. "Don't think me curious. I have my interest, too, in getting at the truth. Don't leave me out of it, pray!"

"Can you come back to-morrow at this time?"

"Yes! yes!"

"Come, then—and you shall know."

"Can I be of any use?"

"Not at present."

"Can my uncle be of any use?"

“Do you know where to communicate with Captain Newenden?”

“Yes—he is staying with some friends in Sussex.”

“We may possibly want his assistance. I can’t tell yet. Don’t keep Mrs. Delamayn waiting any longer, my dear. I shall expect you to-morrow.”

They exchanged an affectionate embrace. Lady Lundie was left alone.

Her ladyship resigned herself to meditation, with frowning brow and close-shut lips. She looked her full age, and a year or two more, as she lay thinking, with her head on her hand, and her elbow on the pillow. After committing herself to the physician (and to the red lavender draught), the commonest regard for consistency made it necessary that she should keep her bed for that day. And yet it was essential that the proposed inquiries should be instantly set on foot. On the one hand, the problem was not an easy one to solve; on the other, her ladyship was not an easy one to beat. How to send for the landlady at Craig Fernie, without exciting any special suspicion or remark—was the question before her. In less than five minutes she had looked back into her memory of current events at Windygates—and had solved it.

Her first proceeding was to ring the bell for her maid.

“I am afraid I frightened you, Hopkins. The state of my nerves. Mrs. Glenarm was a little sudden with some news that surprised me. I am better now—and able to attend to the house-

hold matters. There is a mistake in the butcher's account. Send the cook here."

She took up the domestic ledger and the kitchen report; corrected the butcher; cautioned the cook, and disposed of all arrears of domestic business before Hopkins was summoned again. Having, in this way, dexterously prevented the woman from connecting anything that her mistress said or did, after Mrs. Glenarm's departure, with anything that might have passed during Mrs. Glenarm's visit, Lady Lundie felt herself at liberty to pave the way for the investigation on which she was determined to enter before she slept that night.

"So much for the indoor arrangements," she said. "You must be my prime minister, Hopkins, while I lie helpless here. Is there anything wanted by the people out-of-doors? The coachman? The gardener?"

"I have just seen the gardener, my lady. He came with last week's accounts. I told him he couldn't see your ladyship to-day."

"Quite right. Had he any report to make?"

"No, my lady."

"Surely, there was something I wanted to say to him—or to somebody else? My memorandum book, Hopkins. In the basket, on that chair. Why wasn't the basket placed by my bedside?"

Hopkins brought the memorandum book. Lady Lundie consulted it (without the slightest necessity), with the same masterly gravity exhibited by the doctor when he wrote her prescription (without the slightest necessity also).

“Here it is,” she said, recovering the lost remembrance. “Not the gardener, but the gardener’s wife. A memorandum to speak to her about Mrs. Inchbare. Observe, Hopkins, the association of ideas. Mrs. Inchbare is associated with the poultry; the poultry are associated with the gardener’s wife; the gardener’s wife is associated with the gardener—and so the gardener gets into my head. Do you see it? I am always trying to improve your mind. You do see it? Very well. Now about Mrs. Inchbare. Has she been here again?”

“No, my lady.”

“I am not at all sure, Hopkins, that I was right in declining to consider the message Mrs. Inchbare sent to me about the poultry. Why shouldn’t she offer to take any fowls that I can spare off my hands? She is a respectable woman; and it is important to me to live on good terms with all my neighbors, great and small. Has she got a poultry-yard of her own at Craig Fernie?”

“Yes, my lady. And beautifully kept, I am told.”

“I really don’t see—on reflection, Hopkins—why I should hesitate to deal with Mrs. Inchbare. (I don’t think it beneath me to sell the game killed on my estate to the poulterer.) What was it she wanted to buy? Some of my black Spanish fowls?”

“Yes, my lady. Your ladyship’s black Spaniards are famous all round the neighborhood. Nobody has got the breed. And Mrs. Inchbare—”

“Wants to share the distinction of having the breed with me,” said Lady Lundie. “I won’t appear ungracious. I will see her myself, as soon as I am a little better, and tell her that I have changed my mind. Send one of the men to Craig Fernie with a message. I can’t keep a trifling matter of this sort in my memory—send him at once, or I may forget it. He is to say I am willing to see Mrs. Inchbare, about the fowls, the first time she finds it convenient to come this way.”

“I am afraid, my lady—Mrs. Inchbare’s heart is so set on the black Spaniards—she will find it convenient to come this way at once as fast as her feet can carry her.”

“In that case, you must take her to the gardener’s wife. Say she is to have some eggs—on condition, of course, of paying the price for them. If she does come, mind I hear of it.”

Hopkins withdrew. Hopkins’s mistress reclined on her comfortable pillows, and fanned herself gently. The vindictive smile re-appeared on her face. “I fancy I shall be well enough to see Mrs. Inchbare,” she thought to herself. “And it is just possible that the conversation may get beyond the relative merits of her poultry-yard and mine.”

A lapse of little more than two hours proved Hopkins’s estimate of the latent enthusiasm in Mrs. Inchbare’s character to have been correctly formed. The eager landlady appeared at Windygates on the heels of the returning servant. Among the long list of human weaknesses, a

passion for poultry seems to have its practical advantages (in the shape of eggs) as compared with the more occult frenzies for collecting snuff-boxes and fiddles, and amassing autographs and old postage-stamps. When the mistress of Craig Fernie was duly announced to the mistress of Windygates, Lady Lundie developed a sense of humor for the first time in her life. Her ladyship was feebly merry (the result, no doubt, of the exhilarating properties of the red lavender draught) on the subject of Mrs. Inchbare and the Spanish fowls.

“Most ridiculous, Hopkins! This poor woman must be suffering from a determination of poultry to the brain. Ill as I am, I should have thought that nothing could amuse me. But, really, this good creature starting up and rushing here, as you say, as fast as her feet can carry her—it’s impossible to resist it! I positively think I must see Mrs. Inchbare. With my active habits, this imprisonment to my room is dreadful. I can neither sleep nor read. Anything, Hopkins, to divert my mind from myself. It’s easy to get rid of her if she is too much for me. Send her up.”

CHAPTER THE FORTY-FIRST.

LADY LUNDIE DOES HER DUTY.

MRS. INCHBARE made her appearance, courtesying deferentially; amazed at the condescension which admitted her within the hallowed precincts of Lady Lundie's room.

"Take a chair," said her ladyship, graciously. "I am suffering from illness, as you perceive."

"My certie! sick or well, yer leddyship's a braw sight to see!" returned Mrs. Inchbare, profoundly impressed by the elegant costume which illness assumes when illness appears in the regions of high life.

"I am far from being in a fit state to receive anybody," proceeded Lady Lundie. "But I had a motive for wishing to speak to you when you next came to my house. I failed to treat a proposal you made to me, a short time since, in a friendly and neighborly way. I beg you to understand that I regret having forgotten the

consideration due from a person in my position to a person in yours. I am obliged to say this under very unusual circumstances," added her ladyship, with a glance round her magnificent bedroom, "through your unexpected promptitude in favoring me with a call. You have lost no time, Mrs. Inchbare, in profiting by the message which I had the pleasure of sending to you."

"Eh, my leddy, I wasna that sure (yer leddyship having ance changed yer mind) but that ye might e'en change again if I failed to strike, as they say, while the iron's het. I crave yer pardon, I'm sure, if I ha' been ower hasty. The pride o' my hairt's in my powltry—and the 'black Spaniards' (as they ca' them) are a sair temptation to me to break the tenth commandment, sae lang as they're a' in yer leddyship's possession, and nane o' them in mine."

"I am shocked to hear that I have been the innocent cause of your falling into temptation, Mrs. Inchbare! Make your proposal—and I shall be happy to meet it, if I can."

"I must e'en be content wi' what yer leddyship will condescend on. A haitch o' eggs if I can come by naething else."

"There is something else you would prefer to a hatch of eggs?"

"I wad prefer," said Mrs. Inchbare, modestly, "a cock and twa pullets."

"Open the case on the table behind you," said Lady Lundie, "and you will find some writing-paper inside. Give me a sheet of it—and the pencil out of the tray."

Eagerly watched by Mrs. Inchbare, she wrote an order to the poultry-woman, and held it out with a gracious smile.

“Take that to the gardener’s wife. If you agree with her about the price, you can have the cock and the two pullets.”

Mrs. Inchbare opened her lips—no doubt to express the utmost extremity of human gratitude. Before she had said three words, Lady Lundie’s impatience to reach the end which she had kept in view from the time when Mrs. Glenarm had left the house burst the bounds which had successfully restrained it thus far. Stopping the landlady without ceremony, she fairly forced the conversation to the subject of Anne Silvester’s proceedings at the Craig Fernie inn.

“How are you getting on at the hotel, Mrs. Inchbare? Plenty of tourists, I suppose, at this time of year?”

“Full, my leddy (praise Providence), frae the basement to the ceiling.”

“You had a visitor, I think, some time since of whom I know something? A person—” She paused, and put a strong constraint on herself. There was no alternative but to yield to the hard necessity of making her inquiry intelligible. “A lady,” she added, “who came to you about the middle of last month.”

“Could yer leddyship condescend on her name?”

Lady Lundie put a still stronger constraint on herself. “Silvester,” she said, sharply.

“Presairve us a’!” cried Mrs. Inchbare. “It will never be the same that cam’ driftin’ in by hersel’—wi’ a bit bag in her hand, and a husband left daidling an hour or mair on the road behind her?”

“I have no doubt it is the same.”

“Will she be a freend o’ your leddyship’s?” asked Mrs. Inchbare, feeling her ground cautiously.

“Certainly not!” said Lady Lundie. “I felt a passing curiosity about her—nothing more.”

Mrs. Inchbare looked relieved. “To tell ye truth, my leddy, there was nae love lost between us. She had a maisterfu’ temper o’ her ain—and I was weel pleased when I’d seen the last of her.”

“I can quite understand that, Mrs. Inchbare—I know something of her temper myself. Did I understand you to say that she came to your hotel alone, and that her husband joined her shortly afterward?”

“E’en sae, yer leddyship. I was no’ free to gi’ her house-room in the hottle till her husband daidled in at her heels and answered for her.”

“I fancy I must have seen her husband,” said Lady Lundie. “What sort of a man was he?”

Mrs. Inchbare replied in much the same words which she had used in answering the similar question put by Sir Patrick.

“Eh! he was ower young for the like o’ *her*. A pratty man, my leddy—betwixt tall and short; wi’ bonny brown eyes and cheeks, and fine coal-blaik hair. A nice douce-spoken lad. I hae

naething to say against him—except that he cam' late one day, and took leg-bail betimes the next morning, and left madam behind, a load on my hands."

The answer produced precisely the same effect on Lady Lundie which it had produced on Sir Patrick. She, also, felt that it was too vaguely like too many young men of no uncommon humor and complexion to be relied on. But her ladyship possessed one immense advantage over her brother-in-law in attempting to arrive at the truth. *She* suspected Arnold—and it was possible, in her case, to assist Mrs. Inchbare's memory by hints contributed from her own superior resources of experience and observation.

"Had he anything about him of the look and way of a sailor?" she asked. "And did you notice, when you spoke to him, that he had a habit of playing with a locket on his watch-chain?"

"There he is, het aff to a T!" cried Mrs. Inchbare. "Yer leddyship's weel acquainted wi' him—there's nae doot o' that."

"I thought I had seen him," said Lady Lundie. "A modest, well-behaved young man, Mrs. Inchbare, as you say. Don't let me keep you any longer from the poultry-yard. I am transgressing the doctor's orders in seeing anybody. We quite understand each other now, don't we? Very glad to have seen you. Good-evening."

So she dismissed Mrs. Inchbare, when Mrs. Inchbare had served her purpose.

Most women, in her position, would have been

content with the information which she had now obtained. But Lady Lundie—having a man like Sir Patrick to deal with—determined to be doubly sure of her facts before she ventured on interfering at Ham Farm. She had learned from Mrs. Inchbare that the so-called husband of Anne Silvester had joined her at Craig Fernie on the day when she arrived at the inn, and had left her again the next morning. Anne had made her escape from Windygates on the occasion of the lawn-party—that is to say, on the fourteenth of August. On the same day Arnold Brinkworth had taken his departure for the purpose of visiting the Scotch property left to him by his aunt. If Mrs. Inchbare was to be depended on, he must have gone to Craig Fernie instead of going to his appointed destination—and must, therefore, have arrived to visit his house and lands one day later than the day which he had originally set apart for that purpose. If this fact could be proved on the testimony of a disinterested witness, the case against Arnold would be strengthened ten-fold; and Lady Lundie might act on her discovery with something like a certainty that her information was to be relied on.

After a little consideration she decided on sending a messenger with a note of inquiry addressed to Arnold's steward. The apology she invented to excuse and account for the strangeness of the proposed question referred it to a little family discussion as to the exact date of Arnold's arrival at his estate, and to a friendly wager in which the difference of opinion had ended. If

the steward could state whether his employer had arrived on the fourteenth or on the fifteenth of August, that was all that would be wanted to decide the question in dispute.

Having written in those terms, Lady Lundie gave the necessary directions for having the note delivered at the earliest possible hour on the next morning; the messenger being ordered to make his way back to Windygates by the first return train on the same day.

This arranged, her ladyship was free to refresh herself with another dose of the red lavender draught, and to sleep the sleep of the just, who close their eyes with the composing conviction that they have done their duty.

The events of the next day at Windygates succeeded each other in due course, as follows:

The post arrived, and brought no reply from Sir Patrick. Lady Lundie entered that incident on her mental register of debts owed by her brother-in-law—to be paid, with interest, when the day of reckoning came.

Next in order occurred the return of the messenger with the steward's answer.

He had referred to his Diary; and he had discovered that Mr. Brinkworth had written beforehand to announce his arrival at his estate for the fourteenth of August—but that he had not actually appeared until the fifteenth. The one discovery needed to substantiate Mrs. Inchbare's evidence being now in Lady Lundie's possession, she decided to allow another day to pass—on the

chance that Sir Patrick might alter his mind, and write to her. If no letter arrived, and if nothing more was received from Blanche, she resolved to leave Windygates by the next morning's train, and to try the bold experiment of personal interference at Ham Farm.

The third in the succession of events was the appearance of the doctor to pay his professional visit.

A severe shock awaited him. He found his patient cured by the draught! It was contrary to all rule and precedent; it savored of quackery—the red lavender had no business to do what the red lavender had done—but there she was, nevertheless, up and dressed, and contemplating a journey to London on the next day but one. “An act of duty, doctor, is involved in this—whatever the sacrifice, I must go!” No other explanation could be obtained. The patient was plainly determined—nothing remained for the physician but to retreat with unimpaired dignity, and a paid fee. He did it. “Our art,” he explained to Lady Lundie in confidence, “is nothing, after all, but a choice between alternatives. For instance. I see you—not cured, as you think—but sustained by abnormal excitement. I have to ask which is the least of the two evils—to risk letting you travel, or to irritate you by keeping you at home. With your constitution, we must risk the journey. Be careful to keep the window of the carriage up on the side on which the wind blows. Let the extremities be moderately warm, and the mind easy—

and pray don't omit to provide yourself with a second bottle of the Mixture before you start." He made his bow, as before—he slipped two guineas into his pocket, as before—and he went his way, as before, with an approving conscience, in the character of a physician who had done his duty. (What an enviable profession is Medicine! And why don't we all belong to it?)

The last of the events was the arrival of Mrs. Glenarm.

"Well," she began, eagerly, "what news?"

The narrative of her ladyship's discoveries—recited at full length; and the announcement of her ladyship's resolution—declared in the most uncompromising terms—raised Mrs. Glenarm's excitement to the highest pitch.

"You go to town on Saturday?" she said. "I will go with you. Ever since that woman declared she should be in London before me, I have been dying to hasten my journey—and it is such an opportunity to go with you! I can easily manage it. My uncle and I were to have met in London, early next week, for the foot-race. I have only to write and tell him of my change of plans.—By-the-by, talking of my uncle, I have heard, since I saw you, from the lawyers at Perth."

"More anonymous letters?"

"One more—received by the lawyers this time. My unknown correspondent has written to them to withdraw his proposal, and to announce that he has left Perth. The lawyers recommended me to stop my uncle from spending money use-

lessly in employing the London police. I have forwarded their letter to the captain; and he will probably be in town to see his solicitors as soon as I get there with you. So much for what *I* have done in this matter. Dear Lady Lundie—when we are at our journey's end, what do *you* mean to do?"

"My course is plain," answered her ladyship, calmly. "Sir Patrick will hear from me, on Sunday morning next, at Ham Farm."

"Telling him what you have found out?"

"Certainly not! Telling him that I find myself called to London by business, and that I propose paying him a short visit on Monday next."

"Of course, he must receive you?"

"I think there is no doubt of that. Even *his* hatred of his brother's widow can hardly go to the length—after leaving my letter unanswered—of closing his doors against me next."

"How will you manage it when you get there?"

"When I get there, my dear, I shall be breathing an atmosphere of treachery and deceit, and, for my poor child's sake (abhorrent as all dissimulation is to me), I must be careful what I do. Not a word will escape my lips until I have first seen Blanche in private. However painful it may be, I shall not shrink from my duty, if my duty compels me to open her eyes to the truth. Sir Patrick and Mr. Brinkworth will have somebody else besides an inexperienced young creature to deal with on Monday next. I shall be there."

With that formidable announcement, Lady

Lundie closed the conversation; and Mrs. Glenarm rose to take her leave.

“We meet at the Junction, dear Lady Lundie?”

“At the Junction, on Saturday.”

ELEVENTH SCENE.—SIR PATRICK'S HOUSE.

CHAPTER THE FORTY-SECOND.

THE SMOKING-ROOM WINDOW.

“I CAN'T believe it! I won't believe it! You're trying to part me from my husband—you're trying to set me against my dearest friend. It's infamous. It's horrible. What have I done to you? Oh, my head! my head! Are you trying to drive me mad?”

Pale and wild; her hands twisted in her hair; her feet hurrying her aimlessly to and fro in the room—so Blanche answered her stepmother, when the object of Lady Lundie's pilgrimage had been accomplished, and the cruel truth had been plainly told.

Her ladyship sat, superbly composed, looking out through the window at the placid landscape of woods and fields which surrounded Ham Farm.

“I was prepared for this outbreak,” she said, sadly. “These wild words relieve your overburdened heart, my poor child. I can wait, Blanche—I can wait!”

Blanche stopped, and confronted Lady Lundie.

“You and I never liked each other,” she said. “I wrote you a pert letter from this place. I have always taken Anne’s part against you. I have shown you plainly—rudely, I dare say—that I was glad to be married and get away from you. This is not your revenge, is it?”

“Oh, Blanche, Blanche, what thoughts to think! what words to say! I can only pray for you.”

“I am mad, Lady Lundie. You bear with mad people. Bear with me. I have been hardly more than a fortnight married. I love *him*—I love *her*—with all my heart. Remember what you have told me about them. Remember! remember! remember!”

She reiterated the words with a low cry of pain. Her hands went up to her head again; and she returned restlessly to pacing this way and that in the room.

Lady Lundie tried the effect of a gentle remonstrance. “For your own sake,” she said, “don’t persist in estranging yourself from me. In this dreadful trial, I am the only friend you have.”

Blanche came back to her stepmother’s chair, and looked at her steadily, in silence. Lady Lundie submitted to inspection—and bore it perfectly.

“Look into my heart,” she said. “Blanche! it bleeds for you!”

Blanche heard, without heeding. Her mind was painfully intent on its own thoughts. “You are a religious woman,” she said, abruptly. “Will you swear on your Bible that what you told me is true?”

“*My Bible!*” repeated Lady Lundie, with sorrowful emphasis. “Oh, my child! have *you* no part in that precious inheritance? Is it not *your* Bible, too?”

A momentary triumph showed itself in Blanche’s face. “You daren’t swear it!” she said. “That’s enough for me!”

She turned away scornfully. Lady Lundie caught her by the hand, and drew her sharply back. The suffering saint disappeared, and the woman who was no longer to be trifled with took her place.

“There must be an end to this,” she said. “You don’t believe what I have told you. Have you courage enough to put it to the test?”

Blanche started, and released her hand. She trembled a little. There was a horrible certainty of conviction expressed in Lady Lundie’s sudden change of manner.

“How?” she asked.

“You shall see. Tell me the truth, on your side, first. Where is Sir Patrick? Is he really out, as his servant told me?”

“Yes. He is out with the farm bailiff. You have taken us all by surprise. You wrote that we were to expect you by the next train.”

“When does the next train arrive? It is eleven o’clock now.”

“Between one and two.”

“Sir Patrick will not be back till then?”

“Not till then.”

“Where is Mr. Brinkworth?”

“My husband?”

“Your husband—if you like. Is he out, too?”

“He is in the smoking-room.”

“Do you mean the long room, built out from the back of the house?”

“Yes.”

“Come downstairs at once with me.”

Blanche advanced a step—and drew back. “What do you want of me?” she asked, inspired by a sudden distrust.

Lady Lundie turned round, and looked at her impatiently.

“Can’t you see yet,” she said, sharply, “that your interest and my interest in this matter are one? What have I told you?”

“Don’t repeat it!”

“I must repeat it! I have told you that Arnold Brinkworth was privately at Craig Fernie, with Miss Silvester, in the acknowledged character of her husband—when we supposed him to be visiting the estate left him by his aunt. You refuse to believe it—and I am about to put it to the proof. Is it your interest or is it not, to know whether this man deserves the blind belief that you place in him?”

Blanche trembled from head to foot, and made no reply.

“I am going into the garden, to speak to Mr. Brinkworth through the smoking-room window,” pursued her ladyship. “Have you the courage to come with me; to wait behind out of sight; and to hear what he says with his own lips? I am not afraid of putting it to that test. Are you?”

The tone in which she asked the question roused Blanche’s spirit.

“If I believed him to be guilty,” she said, resolutely, “I should *not* have the courage. I believe him to be innocent. Lead the way, Lady Lundie, as soon as you please.”

They left the room—Blanche’s own room at Ham Farm—and descended to the hall. Lady Lundie stopped, and consulted the railway timetable hanging near the house-door.

“There is a train to London at a quarter to twelve,” she said. “How long does it take to walk to the station?”

“Why do you ask?”

“You will soon know. Answer my question.”

“It’s a walk of twenty minutes to the station.”

Lady Lundie referred to her watch. “There will be just time,” she said.

“Time for what?”

“Come into the garden.”

With that answer, she led the way out.

The smoking-room projected at right angles from the wall of the house, in an oblong form—with a bow-window at the further end, looking into the garden. Before she turned the corner, and showed herself within the range of view

from the window, Lady Lundie looked back, and signed to Blanche to wait behind the angle of the wall. Blanche waited.

The next instant she heard the voices in conversation through the open window. Arnold's voice was the first that spoke.

"Lady Lundie! Why, we didn't expect you till luncheon-time!"

Lady Lundie was ready with her answer.

"I was able to leave town earlier than I had anticipated. Don't put out your cigar; and don't move. I am not coming in."

The quick interchange of question and answer went on—every word being audible in the perfect stillness of the place. Arnold was the next to speak.

"Have you seen Blanche?"

"Blanche is getting ready to go out with me. We mean to have a walk together. I have many things to say to her. Before we go, I have something to say to *you*."

"Is it anything very serious?"

"It is most serious."

"About me?"

"About you. I know where you went on the evening of my lawn-party at Windygates—you went to Craig Fernie."

"Good heavens! how did you find out—?"

"I know whom you went to meet—Miss Silvester. I know what is said of you and of her—you are man and wife."

"Hush! don't speak so loud. Somebody may hear you!"

“What does it matter if they do? I am the only person whom you have kept out of the secret. You all of you know it here.”

“Nothing of the sort! Blanche doesn’t know it.”

“What! Neither you nor Sir Patrick has told Blanche of the situation you stand in at this moment?”

“Not yet. Sir Patrick leaves it to me. I haven’t been able to bring myself to do it. Don’t say a word, I entreat you! I don’t know how Blanche may interpret it. Her friend is expected in London to-morrow. I want to wait till Sir Patrick can bring them together. Her friend will break it to her better than I can. It’s *my* notion. Sir Patrick thinks it a good one. Stop! you’re not going away already?”

“She will be here to look for me if I stay any longer.”

“One word! I want to know—”

“You shall know later in the day.”

Her ladyship appeared again round the angle of the wall. The next words that passed were words spoken in a whisper.

“Are you satisfied now, Blanche?”

“Have you mercy enough left, Lady Lundie, to take me away from this house?”

“My dear child! Why else did I look at the time-table in the hall?”

CHAPTER THE FORTY-THIRD.

THE EXPLOSION.

ARNOLD'S mind was far from easy when he was left by himself again in the smoking-room.

After wasting some time in vainly trying to guess at the source from which Lady Lundie had derived her information, he put on his hat and took the direction which led to Blanche's favorite walk at Ham Farm. Without absolutely distrusting her ladyship's discretion, the idea had occurred to him that he would do well to join his wife and her stepmother. By making a third at the interview between them, he might prevent the conversation from assuming a perilously confidential turn.

The search for the ladies proved useless. They had not taken the direction in which he supposed them to have gone.

He returned to the smoking-room, and composed himself to wait for events as patiently as he might. In this passive position—with his thoughts still running on Lady Lundie—his memory reverted to a brief conversation between Sir Patrick and himself, occasioned, on the previous day, by her ladyship's announcement of her proposed visit to Ham Farm. Sir Patrick had at once expressed his conviction that his sister-in-law's journey South had some acknowledged purpose at the bottom of it.

"I am not at all sure, Arnold" (he had said),

“that I have done wisely in leaving her letter unanswered. And I am strongly disposed to think that the safest course will be to take her into the secret when she comes to-morrow. We can't help the position in which we are placed. It was impossible (without admitting your wife to our confidence) to prevent Blanche from writing that unlucky letter to her—and, even if we had prevented it, she must have heard in other ways of your return to England. I don't doubt my own discretion, so far; and I don't doubt the convenience of keeping her in the dark, as a means of keeping her from meddling in this business of yours, until I have had time to set it right. But she may, by some unlucky accident, discover the truth for herself—and, in that case, I strongly distrust the influence which she might attempt to exercise on Blanche's mind.”

Those were the words—and what had happened on the day after they had been spoken? Lady Lundie *had* discovered the truth; and she was, at that moment, alone somewhere with Blanche. Arnold took up his hat once more, and set forth on the search for the ladies in another direction.

The second expedition was as fruitless as the first. Nothing was to be seen, and nothing was to be heard, of Lady Lundie and Blanche.

Arnold's watch told him that it was not far from the time when Sir Patrick might be expected to return. In all probability, while he had been looking for them, the ladies had gone back by some other way to the house. He en-

tered the rooms on the ground-floor, one after another. They were all empty. He went upstairs, and knocked at the door of Blanche's room. There was no answer. He opened the door and looked in. The room was empty, like the rooms downstairs. But, close to the entrance, there was a trifling circumstance to attract notice, in the shape of a note lying on the carpet. He picked it up, and saw that it was addressed to him in the handwriting of his wife.

He opened it. The note began, without the usual form of address, in these words:

“I know the abominable secret that you and my uncle have hidden from me. I know *your* infamy, and *her* infamy, and the position in which, thanks to you and to her, I now stand. Reproaches would be wasted words, addressed to such a man as you are. I write these lines to tell you that I have placed myself under my step-mother's protection in London. It is useless to attempt to follow me. Others will find out whether the ceremony of marriage which you went through with me is binding on you or not. For myself, I know enough already. I have gone, never to come back, and never to let you see me again.—Blanche.”

Hurrying headlong down the stairs with but one clear idea in his mind—the idea of instantly following his wife—Arnold encountered Sir Patrick, standing by a table in the hall, on which cards and notes left by visitors were usually placed, with an open letter in his hand. Seeing in an instant what had happened, he

threw one of his arms round Arnold, and stopped him at the house-door.

“You are a man,” he said, firmly. “Bear it like a man.”

Arnold’s head fell on the shoulder of his kind old friend. He burst into tears.

Sir Patrick let the irrepressible outbreak of grief have its way. In those first moments, silence was mercy. He said nothing. The letter which he had been reading (from Lady Lundie, it is needless to say) dropped unheeded at his feet.

Arnold lifted his head, and dashed away the tears.

“I am ashamed of myself,” he said. “Let me go.”

“Wrong, my poor fellow—doubly wrong!” returned Sir Patrick. “There is no shame in shedding such tears as those. And there is nothing to be done by leaving *me*.”

“I must and will see her!”

“Read that,” said Sir Patrick, pointing to the letter on the floor. “See your wife? Your wife is with the woman who has written those lines. Read them.”

Arnold read them.

“DEAR SIR PATRICK—If you had honored me with your confidence, I should have been happy to consult you before I interfered to rescue Blanche from the position in which Mr. Brinkworth has placed her. As it is, your late brother’s child is under my protection at my house in

London. If *you* attempt to exercise your authority, it must be by main force—I will submit to nothing less. If Mr. Brinkworth attempts to exercise *his* authority, he shall establish his right to do so (if he can) in a police-court.

“Very truly yours,

“JULIA LUNDIE.”

Arnold’s resolution was not to be shaken even by this. “What do I care,” he burst out, hotly, “whether I am dragged through the streets by the police or not! I *will* see my wife. I *will* clear myself of the horrible suspicion she has about me! You have shown me your letter. Look at mine!”

Sir Patrick’s clear sense saw the wild words that Blanche had written in their true light.

“Do you hold your wife responsible for that letter?” he asked. “I see her stepmother in every line of it. You descend to something unworthy of you, if you seriously defend yourself against *this*! You can’t see it? You persist in holding to your own view? Write, then. You can’t get to her—your letter may. No! When you leave this house, you leave it with me. I have conceded something, on my side, in allowing you to write. I insist on your conceding something, on your side, in return. Come into the library! I answer for setting things right between you and Blanche, if you will place your interests in my hands. Do you trust me or not?”

Arnold yielded. They went into the library together. Sir Patrick pointed to the writing-

table. "Relieve your mind there," he said; "and let me find you a reasonable man again when I come back."

When he returned to the library the letter was written; and Arnold's mind was so far relieved—for the time at least.

"I shall take your letter to Blanche myself," said Sir Patrick, "by the train that leaves for London in half an hour's time."

"You will let me go with you?"

"Not to-day. I shall be back this evening to dinner. You shall hear all that has happened; and you shall accompany me to London to-morrow—if I find it necessary to make any lengthened stay there. Between this and then, after the shock that you have suffered, you will do well to be quiet here. Be satisfied with my assurance that Blanche shall have your letter. I will force my authority on her stepmother to that extent (if her stepmother resists) without scruple. The respect in which I hold the sex only lasts as long as the sex deserves it—and does *not* extend to Lady Lundie. There is no advantage that a man can take of a woman which I am not fully prepared to take of my sister-in-law."

With that characteristic farewell, he shook hands with Arnold, and departed for the station.

At seven o'clock the dinner was on the table. At seven o'clock Sir Patrick came downstairs to eat it, as perfectly dressed as usual, and as composed as if nothing had happened.

“She has got your letter,” he whispered, as he took Arnold’s arm, and led him into the dining-room.

“Did she say anything?”

“Not a word.”

“How did she look?”

“As she ought to look—sorry for what she has done.”

The dinner began. As a matter of necessity, the subject of Sir Patrick’s expedition was dropped while the servants were in the room—to be regularly taken up again by Arnold in the intervals between the courses. He began when the soup was taken away.

“I confess I had hoped to see Blanche come back with you!” he said, sadly enough.

“In other words,” returned Sir Patrick, “you forgot the native obstinacy of the sex. Blanche is beginning to feel that she has been wrong. What is the necessary consequence? She naturally persists in being wrong. Let her alone, and leave your letter to have its effect. The serious difficulties in our way don’t rest with Blanche. Content yourself with knowing that.”

The fish came in, and Arnold was silenced—until his next opportunity came with the next interval in the course of the dinner.

“What are the difficulties?” he asked.

“The difficulties are my difficulties and yours,” answered Sir Patrick. “My difficulty is, that I can’t assert my authority as guardian if I assume my niece (as I do) to be a married woman. Your difficulty is, that you can’t assert your

authority as her husband, until it is distinctly proved that you and Miss Silvester are not man and wife. Lady Lundie was perfectly aware that she would place us in that position when she removed Blanche from this house. She has cross-examined Mrs. Inchbare; she has written to your steward for the date of your arrival at your estate; she has done everything, calculated everything, and foreseen everything—except my excellent temper. The one mistake she has made, is in thinking she could get the better of *that*. No, my dear boy! My trump card is my temper. I keep it in my hand, Arnold—I keep it in my hand!”

The next course came in—and there was an end of the subject again. Sir Patrick enjoyed his mutton, and entered on a long and interesting narrative of the history of some rare white Burgundy on the table imported by himself. Arnold resolutely resumed the discussion with the departure of the mutton.

“It seems to be a dead-lock,” he said.

“No slang!” retorted Sir Patrick.

“For Heaven’s sake, sir, consider my anxiety, and tell me what you propose to do!”

“I propose to take you to London with me to-morrow, on this condition—that you promise me, on your word of honor, not to attempt to see your wife before Saturday next.”

“I shall see her then?”

“If you give me your promise.”

“I do! I do!”

The next course came in. Sir Patrick entered

on the question of the merits of the partridge, viewed as an eatable bird. "By himself, Arnold—plainly roasted, and tested on his own merits—an overrated bird. Being too fond of shooting him in this country, we become too fond of eating him next. Properly understood, he is a vehicle for sauce and truffles—nothing more. Or no—that is hardly doing him justice. I am bound to add that he is honorably associated with the famous French receipt for cooking an olive. Do you know it?"

There was an end of the bird; there was an end of the jelly. Arnold got his next chance—and took it.

"What is to be done in London to-morrow?" he asked.

"To-morrow," answered Sir Patrick, "is a memorable day in our calendar. To-morrow is Tuesday—the day on which I am to see Miss Silvester."

Arnold set down the glass of wine which he was just raising to his lips.

"After what has happened," he said, "I can hardly bear to hear her name mentioned. Miss Silvester has parted me from my wife."

"Miss Silvester may atone for that, Arnold, by uniting you again."

"She has been the ruin of me so far."

"She may be the salvation of you yet."

The cheese came in; and Sir Patrick returned to the Art of Cookery.

"Do you know the receipt for cooking an olive, Arnold?"

“No.”

“What *does* the new generation know? It knows how to row, how to shoot, how to play at cricket, and how to bet. When it has lost its muscle and lost its money—that is to say, when it has grown old—what a generation it will be! It doesn’t matter: I shan’t live to see it. Are you listening, Arnold?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How to cook an olive: Put an olive into a lark; put a lark into a quail; put a quail into a plover; put a plover into a partridge; put a partridge into a pheasant; put a pheasant into a turkey. Good. First, partially roast; then carefully stew—until all is thoroughly done down to the olive. Good again. Next, open the window. Throw out the turkey, the pheasant, the partridge, the plover, the quail, and the lark. *Then, eat the olive.* The dish is expensive, but (we have it on the highest authority) well worth the sacrifice. The quintessence of the flavor of six birds, concentrated in one olive. Grand idea! Try another glass of the white Burgundy, Arnold.”

At last the servants left them, with the wine and dessert on the table.

“I have borne it as long as I can, sir,” said Arnold. “Add to all your kindness to me by telling me at once what happened at Lady Lundie’s.”

It was a chilly evening. A bright wood fire was burning in the room. Sir Patrick drew his chair to the fire.

“This is exactly what happened,” he said. “I found company at Lady Lundie’s, to begin with. Two perfect strangers to me. Captain Newenden, and his niece, Mrs. Glenarm. Lady Lundie offered to see me in another room; the two strangers offered to withdraw. I declined both proposals. First check to her ladyship! She has reckoned throughout, Arnold, on our being afraid to face public opinion. I showed her at starting that we were as ready to face it as she was. ‘I always accept what the French call accomplished facts,’ I said. ‘You have brought matters to a crisis, Lady Lundie. So let it be. I have a word to say to my niece (in your presence, if you like); and I have another word to say to you afterward—without presuming to disturb your guests.’ The guests sat down again (both naturally devoured by curiosity). Could her ladyship decently refuse me an interview with my own niece, while two witnesses were looking on? Impossible. I saw Blanche (Lady Lundie being present, it is needless to say) in the back drawing-room. I gave her your letter; I said a good word for you; I saw that she was sorry, though she wouldn’t own it—and that was enough. We went back into the front drawing-room. I had not spoken five words on our side of the question before it appeared, to my astonishment and delight, that Captain Newenden was in the house on the very question that had brought me into the house—the question of you and Miss Silvester. My business, in the interests of *my* niece, was to deny your marriage to

the lady. His business, in the interests of *his* niece, was to assert your marriage to the lady. To the unutterable disgust of the two women, we joined issue, in the most friendly manner, on the spot. 'Charmed to have the pleasure of meeting you, Captain Newenden.'—'Delighted to have the honor of making your acquaintance, Sir Patrick.'—'I think we can settle this in two minutes?'—'My own idea perfectly expressed.'—'State your position, Captain.'—'With the greatest pleasure. Here is my niece, Mrs. Glenarm, engaged to marry Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn. All very well, but there happens to be an obstacle—in the shape of a lady. Do I put it plainly?'—'You put it admirably, Captain; but for the loss to the British navy, you ought to have been a lawyer. Pray, go on.'—'You are too good, Sir Patrick. I resume. Mr. Delamayn asserts that this person in the background has no claim on him, and backs his assertion by declaring that she is married already to Mr. Arnold Brinkworth. Lady Lundie and my niece assure me, on evidence which satisfies *them*, that the assertion is true. The evidence does not satisfy *me*. I hope, Sir Patrick, I don't strike you as being an excessively obstinate man?'—'My dear sir, you impress me with the highest opinion of your capacity for sifting human testimony! May I ask, next, what course you mean to take?'—'The very thing I was going to mention, Sir Patrick! This is my course: I refuse to sanction my niece's engagement to Mr. Delamayn, until Mr. Delamayn has actually proved his statement by ap-

peal to witnesses of the lady's marriage. He refers me to two witnesses; but declines acting at once in the matter for himself, on the ground that he is in training for a foot-race. I admit that that is an obstacle, and consent to arrange for bringing the two witnesses to London myself. By this post I have witten to my lawyers in Perth to look the witnesses up; to offer them the necessary terms (at Mr. Delamayn's expense) for the use of their time; and to produce them by the end of the week. The foot-race is on Thursday next. Mr. Delamayn will be able to attend after that, and establish his own assertion by his own witnesses. What do you say, Sir Patrick, to Saturday next (with Lady Lundie's permission) in this room?' There is the substance of the captain's statement. He is as old as I am, and is dressed to look like thirty; but a very pleasant fellow for all that. I struck my sister-in-law dumb by accepting the proposal without a moment's hesitation. Mrs. Glenarm and Lady Lundie looked at each other in mute amazement. Here was a difference about which two women would have mortally quarreled; and here were two men settling it in the friendliest possible manner. I wish you had seen Lady Lundie's face when I declared myself deeply indebted to Captain Newenden for rendering any prolonged interview with her ladyship quite unnecessary. 'Thanks to the captain,' I said to her, in the most cordial manner, 'we have absolutely nothing to discuss. I shall catch the next train, and set Arnold Brinkworth's mind quite at ease.' To

come back to serious things, I have engaged to produce you, in the presence of everybody—your wife included—on Saturday next. I put a bold face on it before the others. But I am bound to tell *you* that it is by no means easy to say—situated as we are now—what the result of Saturday's inquiry will be. Everything depends on the issue of my interview with Miss Silvester to-morrow. It is no exaggeration to say, Arnold, that your fate is in her hands."

"I wish to Heaven I had never set eyes on her!" said Arnold.

"Lay the saddle on the right horse," returned Sir Patrick. "Wish you had never set eyes on Geoffrey Delamayn."

Arnold hung his head. Sir Patrick's sharp tongue had got the better of him once more.

TWELFTH SCENE.—DRURY LANE.

CHAPTER THE FORTY-FOURTH.

THE LETTER AND THE LAW.

THE many-toned murmur of the current of London life—flowing through the murky channel of Drury Lane—found its muffled way from the front room to the back. Piles of old music lumbered the dusty floor. Stage masks and

weapons, and portraits of singers and dancers, hung round the walls. An empty violin-case in one corner faced a broken bust of Rossini in another. A frameless print, representing the Trial of Queen Caroline, was pasted over the fireplace. The chairs were genuine specimens of ancient carving in oak. The table was an equally excellent example of dirty modern deal. A small morsel of drugget was on the floor; and a large deposit of soot was on the ceiling. The scene thus presented, revealed itself in the back drawing-room of a house in Drury Lane, devoted to the transaction of musical and theatrical business of the humbler sort. It was late in the afternoon, on Michaelmas-day. Two persons were seated together in the room: they were Anne Silvester and Sir Patrick Lundie.

The opening conversation between them—comprising, on one side, the narrative of what had happened at Perth and at Swanhaven; and, on the other, a statement of the circumstances attending the separation of Arnold and Blanche—had come to an end. It rested with Sir Patrick to lead the way to the next topic. He looked at his companion, and hesitated.

“Do you feel strong enough to go on?” he asked. “If you would prefer to rest a little, pray say so.”

“Thank you, Sir Patrick. I am more than ready, I am eager, to go on. No words can say how anxious I feel to be of some use to you, if I can. It rests entirely with your experience to show me how.”

“I can only do that, Miss Silvester, by asking you without ceremony for all the information that I want. Had you any object in traveling to London, which you have not mentioned to me yet? I mean, of course, any object with which I have a claim (as Arnold Brinkworth’s representative) to be acquainted?”

“I had an object, Sir Patrick. And I have failed to accomplish it.”

“May I ask what it was?”

“It was to see Geoffrey Delamayn.”

Sir Patrick started. “You have attempted to see *him*! When?”

“This morning.”

“Why, you only arrived in London last night!”

“I only arrived,” said Anne, “after waiting many days on the journey. I was obliged to rest at Edinburgh, and again at York—and I was afraid I had given Mrs. Glenarm time enough to get Geoffrey Delamayn before me.”

“Afraid?” repeated Sir Patrick. “I understood that you had no serious intention of disputing the scoundrel with Mrs. Glenarm. What motive could possibly have taken you *his* way?”

“The same motive which took me to Swanhaven.”

“What! the idea that it rested with Delamayn to set things right? and that you might bribe him to do it, by consenting to release him, so far as your claims were concerned?”

“Bear with my folly, Sir Patrick, as patiently as you can! I am always alone now; and I get into a habit of brooding over things. I have

been brooding over the position in which my misfortunes have placed Mr. Brinkworth. I have been obstinate—unreasonably obstinate—in believing that I could prevail with Geoffrey Delamayn, after I had failed with Mrs. Glenarm. I am obstinate about it still. If he would only have heard me, my madness in going to Fulham might have had its excuse.” She sighed bitterly, and said no more.

Sir Patrick took her hand.

“It *has* its excuse,” he said, kindly. “Your motive is beyond reproach. Let me add—to quiet your mind—that, even if Delamayn had been willing to hear you, and had accepted the condition, the result would still have been the same. You are quite wrong in supposing that he has only to speak, and to set this matter right. It has passed entirely beyond his control. The mischief was done when Arnold Brinkworth spent those unlucky hours with you at Craig Fernie.”

“Oh, Sir Patrick, if I had only known that, before I went to Fulham this morning!”

She shuddered as she said the words. Something was plainly associated with her visit to Geoffrey, the bare remembrance of which shook her nerves. What was it? Sir Patrick resolved to obtain an answer to that question before he ventured on proceeding further with the main object of the interview.

“You have told me your reason for going to Fulham,” he said. “But I have not heard what happened there yet.”

Anne hesitated. "Is it necessary for me to trouble you about that?" she asked, with evident reluctance to enter on the subject.

"It is absolutely necessary," answered Sir Patrick, "because Delamayn is concerned in it."

Anne summoned her resolution, and entered on her narrative in these words:

"The person who carries on the business here discovered the address for me," she began. "I had some difficulty, however, in finding the house. It is little more than a cottage; and it is quite lost in a great garden, surrounded by high walls. I saw a carriage waiting. The coachman was walking his horses up and down—and he showed me the door. It was a high wooden door in the wall, with a grating in it. I rang the bell. A servant-girl opened the grating and looked at me. She refused to let me in. Her mistress had ordered her to close the door on all strangers—especially strangers who were women. I contrived to pass some money to her through the grating, and asked to speak to her mistress. After waiting some time I saw another face behind the bars—and it struck me that I recognized it. I suppose I was nervous. It startled me. I said, 'I think we know each other.' There was no answer. The door was suddenly opened—and who do you think stood before me?"

"Was it somebody I know?"

"Yes."

"Man? or woman?"

“It was Hester Dethridge.”

“Hester Dethridge!”

“Yes. Dressed just as usual, and looking just as usual—with her slate hanging at her side.”

“Astonishing! Where did I last see her? At the Windygates station, to be sure—going to London, after she had left my sister-in-law’s service. Has she accepted another place—with-
out letting me know first, as I told her?”

“She is living at Fulham.”

“In service?”

“No. As mistress of her own house.”

“What! Hester Dethridge in possession of a house of her own? Well! well! why shouldn’t she have a rise in the world like other people? Did she let you in?”

“She stood for some time looking at me, in that dull strange way that she has. The servants at Windygates always said she was not in her right mind—and you will say, Sir Patrick, when you hear what happened, that the servants were not mistaken. She must be mad. I said, ‘Don’t you remember me?’ She lifted her slate, and wrote, ‘I remember you, in a dead swoon at Windygates House.’ I was quite unaware that she had been present when I fainted in the library. The discovery startled me—or that dreadful, dead-cold look that she has in her eyes startled me—I don’t know which. I couldn’t speak to her just at first. She wrote on her slate again—the strangest question—in these words: ‘I said, at the time, brought to it by a man. Did I say true?’ If the question had been put

in the usual way, by anybody else, I should have considered it too insolent to be noticed. Can you understand my answering it, Sir Patrick? I can't understand it myself now—and yet I did answer. She forced me to it with her stony eyes. I said 'Yes.' ”

“Did all this take place at the door?”

“At the door.”

“When did she let you in?”

“The next thing she did was to let me in. She took me by the arm, in a rough way, and drew me inside the door, and shut it. My nerves are broken; my courage is gone. I crept with cold when she touched me. She dropped my arm. I stood like a child, waiting for what it pleased her to say or do next. She rested her two hands on her sides, and took a long look at me. She made a horrid dumb sound—not as if she was angry; more, if such a thing could be, as if she was satisfied—pleased even, I should have said, if it had been anybody but Hester Dethridge. Do you understand it?”

“Not yet. Let me get nearer to understanding it by asking something before you go on. Did she show any attachment to you, when you were both at Windygates?”

“Not the least. She appeared to be incapable of attachment to me, or to anybody.”

“Did she write any more questions on her slate?”

“Yes. She wrote another question under what she had written just before. Her mind was still running on my fainting-fit, and on the 'man'

who had 'brought me to it.' She held up the slate; and the words were these: 'Tell me how he served you; did he knock you down?' Most people would have laughed at the question. I was startled by it. I told her, No. She shook her head as if she didn't believe me. She wrote on her slate, 'We are loth to own it when they up with their fists and beat us—ain't we?' I said, 'You are quite wrong.' She went on obstinately with her writing. 'Who is the man?' was her next question. I had control enough over myself to decline telling her that. She opened the door, and pointed to me to go out. I made a sign entreating her to wait a little. She went back, in her impenetrable way, to the writing on the slate—still about the 'man.' This time the question was plainer still. She had evidently placed her own interpretation of my appearance at the house. She wrote, 'Is it the man who lodges here?' I saw that she would close the door on me if I didn't answer. My only chance with her was to own that she had guessed right. I said 'Yes. I want to see him.' She took me by the arm as roughly as before and led me into the house."

"I begin to understand her," said Sir Patrick. "I remember hearing, in my brother's time, that she had been brutally ill-used by her husband. The association of ideas, even in *her* confused brain, becomes plain, if you bear that in mind. What is her last remembrance of you? It is the remembrance of a fainting woman at Windygates."

“Yes.”

“She makes you acknowledge that she has guessed right, in guessing that a man was, in some way, answerable for the condition in which she found you. A swoon produced by a shock inflicted on the mind, is a swoon that she doesn't understand. She looks back into her own experience, and associates it with the exercise of actual physical brutality on the part of the man. And she sees, in you, a reflection of her own sufferings and her own case. It's curious—to a student of human nature. And it explains, what is otherwise unintelligible, her overlooking her own instructions to the servant, and letting you into the house. What happened next?”

“She took me into a room, which I suppose was her own room. She made signs, offering me tea. It was done in the strangest way—without the least appearance of kindness. After what you have just said to me, I think I can in some degree interpret what was going on in her mind. I believe she felt a hard-hearted interest in seeing a woman whom she supposed to be as unfortunate as she had once been herself. I declined taking any tea, and tried to return to the subject of what I wanted in the house. She paid no heed to me. She pointed round the room; and then took me to a window, and pointed round the garden—and then made a sign indicating herself. ‘My house; and my garden’—that was what she meant. There were four men in the garden—and Geoffrey Delamayn was one of them. I made another attempt to tell her that

I wanted to speak to him. But, no! She had her own idea in her mind. After beckoning me to leave the window, she led the way to the fire-place, and showed me a sheet of paper with writing on it, framed and placed under a glass, and hung on the wall. She seemed, I thought, to feel some kind of pride in her framed manuscript. At any rate, she insisted on my reading it. It was an extract from a will."

"The will under which she had inherited the house?"

"Yes. Her brother's will. It said that he regretted, on his death-bed, his estrangement from his only sister, dating from the time when she had married in defiance of his wishes and against his advice. As a proof of his sincere desire to be reconciled with her before he died, and as some compensation for the sufferings that she had endured at the hands of her deceased husband, he left her an income of two hundred pounds a year, together with the use of his house and garden, for her lifetime. That, as well as I remember, was the substance of what it said."

"Creditable to her brother and creditable to herself," said Sir Patrick. "Taking her odd character into consideration, I understand her liking it to be seen. What puzzles me is her letting lodgings with an income of her own to live on."

"That was the very question which I put to her myself. I was obliged to be cautious, and to begin by asking about the lodgers first—the men being still visible out in the garden, to ex-

cuse the inquiry. The rooms to let in the house had (as I understood her) been taken by a person acting for Geoffrey Delamayn—his trainer, I presume. He had surprised Hester Dethridge by barely noticing the house, and showing the most extraordinary interest in the garden.”

“That is quite intelligible, Miss Silvester. The garden you have described would be just the place he wanted for the exercises of his employer—plenty of space, and well secured from observation by the high walls all round. What next?”

“Next, I got to the question of why she should let her house in lodgings at all. When I asked her that, her face turned harder than ever. She answered me on her slate in these dismal words: ‘I have not got a friend in the world. I dare not live alone.’ There was her reason! Dreary and dreadful, Sir Patrick, was it not?”

“Dreary indeed! How did it end? Did you get into the garden?”

“Yes—at the second attempt. She seemed suddenly to change her mind; she opened the door for me herself. Passing the window of the room in which I had left her, I looked back. She had taken her place at a table before the window, apparently watching for what might happen. There was something about her, as her eyes met mine (I can’t say what), which made me feel uneasy at the time. Adopting your view, I am almost inclined to think now, horrid as the idea is, that she had the expectation of seeing me treated as *she* had been treated in former days. It was actually a relief to me—though I

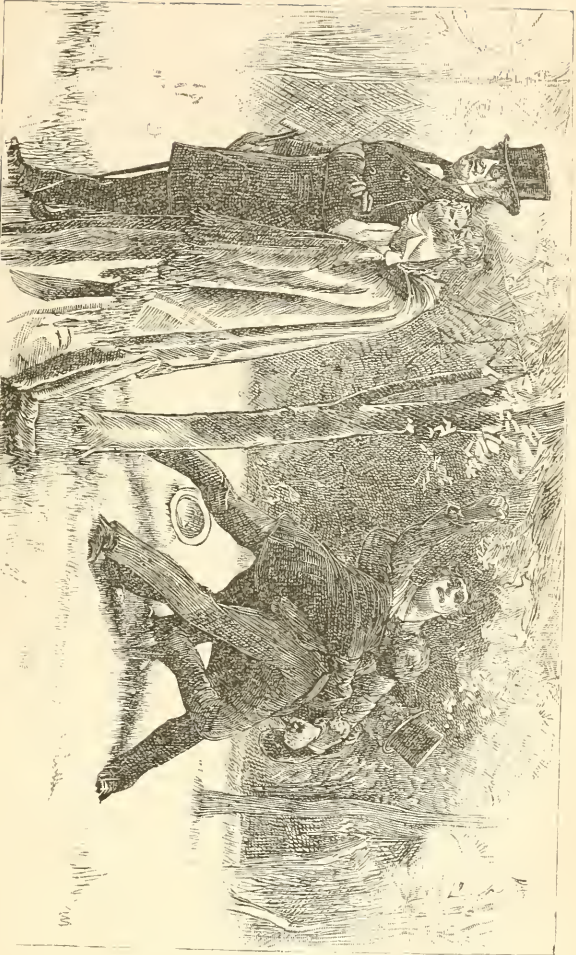
knew I was going to run a serious risk—to lose sight of her. As I got nearer to the men in the garden, I heard two of them talking very earnestly to Geoffrey Delamayn. The fourth person, an elderly gentleman, stood apart from the rest at some little distance. I kept as far as I could out of sight, waiting till the talk was over. It was impossible for me to help hearing it. The two men were trying to persuade Geoffrey Delamayn to speak to the elderly gentleman. They pointed to him as a famous medical man. They reiterated over and over again that his opinion was well worth having—”

Sir Patrick interrupted her. “Did they mention his name?” he asked.

“Yes. They call him Mr. Speedwell.”

“The man himself! This is even more interesting, Miss Silvester, than you suppose. I myself heard Mr. Speedwell warn Delamayn that he was in broken health, when we were visiting together at Windygates House last month. Did he do as the other men wished him? Did he speak to the surgeon?”

“No. He sulkily refused—he remembered what you remember. He said, ‘See the man who told me I was broken down?—not I!’ After confirming it with an oath, he turned away from the others. Unfortunately, he took the direction in which I was standing, and discovered me. The bare sight of me seemed to throw him instantly into a state of frenzy. He—it is impossible for me to repeat the language that he used: it is bad enough to have heard it. I believe,



“ HE GAVE ME HIS ARM, AND LED ME BACK TO THE HOUSE.”

—Man and Wife, Vol. Four, page 119.

Sir Patrick, but for the two men, who ran up and laid hold of him, that Hester Dethridge would have seen what she expected to see. The change in him was so frightful—even to me, well as I thought I knew him in his fits of passion—I tremble when I think of it. One of the men who had restrained him was almost as brutal in his way. He declared, in the foulest language, that if Delamayn had a fit he would lose the race, and that I should be answerable for it. But for Mr. Speedwell, I don't know what I should have done. He came forward directly. 'This is no place either for you or for me,' he said—and gave me his arm, and led me back to the house. Hester Dethridge met us in the passage, and lifted her hand to stop me. Mr. Speedwell asked her what she wanted. She looked at me, and then looked toward the garden, and made the motion of striking a blow with her clinched fist. For the first time in my experience of her—I hope it was my fancy—I thought I saw her smile. Mr. Speedwell took me out. 'They are well matched in that house,' he said. 'The woman is as complete a savage as the men.' The carriage which I had seen waiting at the door was his. He called it up, and politely offered me a place in it. I said I would only trespass on his kindness as far as to the railway station. While we were talking, Hester Dethridge followed us to the door. She made the same motion again with her clinched hand, and looked back toward the garden—and then looked at me, and nodded her head, as much as to say,

‘He will do it yet!’ No words can describe how glad I was to see the last of her. I hope and trust I shall never set eyes on her again!”

“Did you hear how Mr. Speedwell came to be at the house? Had he gone of his own accord? or had he been sent for?”

“He had been sent for. I ventured to speak to him about the persons whom I had seen in the garden. Mr. Speedwell explained everything which I was not able of myself to understand, in the kindest manner. One of the two strange men in the garden was the trainer; the other was a doctor, whom the trainer was usually in the habit of consulting. It seems that the real reason for their bringing Geoffrey Delamayn away from Scotland when they did, was that the trainer was uneasy, and wanted to be near London for medical advice. The doctor, on being consulted, owned that he was at a loss to understand the symptoms which he was asked to treat. He had himself fetched the great surgeon to Fulham, that morning. Mr. Speedwell abstained from mentioning that he had foreseen what would happen at Windygates. All he said was, ‘I had met Mr. Delamayn in society, and I felt interest enough in the case to pay him a visit—with what result, you have seen yourself.’”

“Did he tell you anything about Delamayn’s health?”

“He said that he had questioned the doctor on the way to Fulham, and that some of the patient’s symptoms indicated serious mischief.

What the symptoms were I did not hear. Mr. Speedwell only spoke of changes for the worse in him which a woman would be likely to understand. At one time, he would be so dull and heedless that nothing could rouse him. At another, he flew into the most terrible passions without any apparent cause. The trainer had found it almost impossible (in Scotland) to keep him to the right diet; and the doctor had only sanctioned taking the house at Fulham, after being first satisfied not only of the convenience of the garden, but also that Hester Dethridge could be thoroughly trusted as a cook. With her help, they had placed him on an entirely new diet. But they had found an unexpected difficulty even in doing that. When the trainer took him to the new lodgings, it turned out that he had seen Hester Dethridge at Windygates, and had taken the strongest prejudice against her. On seeing her again at Fulham, he appeared to be absolutely terrified."

"Terrified? Why?"

"Nobody knows why. The trainer and the doctor together could only prevent his leaving the house, by threatening to throw up the responsibility of preparing him for the race, unless he instantly controlled himself, and behaved like a man instead of a child. Since that time, he has become reconciled, little by little, to his new abode—partly through Hester Dethridge's caution in keeping herself always out of his way; and partly through his own appreciation of the change in his diet, which Hester's skill in cook-

ery has enabled the doctor to make. Mr. Speedwell mentioned some things which I have forgotten. I can only repeat, Sir Patrick, the result at which he has arrived in his own mind. Coming from a man of his authority, the opinion seems to me to be startling in the last degree. If Geoffrey Delamayn runs in the race on Thursday next, he will do it at the risk of his life."

"At the risk of dying on the ground?"

"Yes."

Sir Patrick's face became thoughtful. He waited a little before he spoke again.

"We have not wasted our time," he said, "in dwelling on what happened during your visit to Fulham. The possibility of this man's death suggests to my mind serious matter for consideration. It is very desirable, in the interests of my niece and her husband, that I should be able to foresee, if I can, how a fatal result of the race might affect the inquiry which is to be held on Saturday next. I believe you may be able to help me in this."

"You have only to tell me how, Sir Patrick."

"I may count on your being present on Saturday?"

"Certainly."

"You thoroughly understand that, in meeting Blanche, you will meet a person estranged from you, for the present—a friend and sister who has ceased (under Lady Lundie's influence mainly) to feel as a friend and sister toward you now?"

"I was not quite unprepared, Sir Patrick, to hear that Blanche had misjudged me. When I

wrote my letter to Mr. Brinkworth, I warned him as delicately as I could that his wife's jealousy might be very easily roused. You may rely on my self-restraint, no matter how hardly it may be tried. Nothing that Blanche can say or do will alter my grateful remembrance of the past. While I live, I love her. Let that assurance quiet any little anxiety that you may have felt as to my conduct—and tell me how I can serve those interests which I have at heart as well as you."

"You can serve them, Miss Silvester, in this way. You can make me acquainted with the position in which you stood toward Delamayn at the time when you went to the Craig Fernie inn."

"Put any questions to me that you think right, Sir Patrick."

"You mean that?"

"I mean it."

"I will begin by recalling something which you have already told me. Delamayn has promised you marriage—"

"Over and over again!"

"In words?"

"Yes."

"In writing?"

"Yes."

"Do you see what I am coming to?"

"Hardly yet."

"You referred, when we first met in this room, to a letter which you recovered from Bishopriggs, at Perth. I have ascertained from Arnold Brinkworth that the sheet of note-paper stolen

from you contained two letters. One was written by you to Delamayn—the other was written by Delamayn to you. The substance of this last Arnold remembered. Your letter he had not read. It is of the utmost importance, Miss Silvester, to let me see that correspondence before we part to-day.”

Anne made no answer. She sat with her clasped hands on her lap. Her eyes looked uneasily away from Sir Patrick’s face, for the first time.

“Will it not be enough,” she asked, after an interval, “if I tell you the substance of my letter, without showing it?”

“It will *not* be enough,” returned Sir Patrick, in the plainest manner. “I hinted—if you remember—at the propriety of my seeing the letter, when you first mentioned it; and I observed that you purposely abstained from understanding me. I am grieved to put you, on this occasion, to a painful test. But if you *are* to help me at this serious crisis, I have shown you the way.”

Anne rose from her chair, and answered by putting the letter into Sir Patrick’s hands. “Remember what he has done since I wrote that,” she said. “And try to excuse me, if I own that I am ashamed to show it to you now.”

With those words she walked aside to the window. She stood there, with her hand pressed on her breast, looking out absently on the murky London view of house-roof and chimney, while Sir Patrick opened the letter.

It is necessary to the right appreciation of events, that other eyes besides Sir Patrick's should follow the brief course of the correspondence in this place.

1. *From Anne Silvester to Geoffrey Delamayn.*

“WINDYGATES HOUSE, August 12, 1868.

“GEOFFREY DELAMAYN—I have waited in the hope that you would ride over from your brother's place and see me—and I have waited in vain. Your conduct to me is cruelty itself; I will bear it no longer. Consider! in your own interests, consider—before you drive the miserable woman who has trusted you to despair. You have promised me marriage by all that is sacred. I claim your promise. I insist on nothing less than to be what you vowed I should be—what I have waited all this weary time to be—what I *am*, in the sight of Heaven, your wedded wife. Lady Lundie gives a lawn-party here on the 14th. I know you have been asked. I expect you to accept her invitation. If I don't see you, I won't answer for what may happen. My mind is made up to endure this suspense no longer. Oh, Geoffrey, remember the past! Be faithful—be just—to your loving wife,

“ANNE SILVESTER.”

2. *From Geoffrey Delamayn to Anne Silvester.*

“DEAR ANNE—Just called to London to my father. They have telegraphed him in a bad way. Stop where you are, and I will write you.

Trust the bearer. Upon my soul, I'll keep my promise. Your loving husband that is to be,

“GEOFFREY DELAMAYN.

“WINDYGATES HOUSE, *Aug. 14, 4 P.M.*

“In a mortal hurry. Train starts at 4.30.”

Sir Patrick read the correspondence with breathless attention to the end. At the last lines of the last letter he did what he had not done for twenty years past—he sprang to his feet at a bound, and he crossed a room without the help of his ivory cane.

Anne started; and turning round from the window, looked at him in silent surprise. He was under the influence of strong emotion; his face, his voice, his manner, all showed it.

“How long had you been in Scotland when you wrote this?” He pointed to Anne’s letter as he asked the question, putting it so eagerly that he stammered over the first words. “More than three weeks?” he added, with his bright black eyes fixed in absorbing interest on her face.

“Yes.”

“Are you sure of that?”

“I am certain of it.”

“You can refer to persons who have seen you?”

“Easily.”

He turned the sheet of note-paper, and pointed to Geoffrey’s penciled letter on the fourth page.

“How long had *he* been in Scotland when *he* wrote this? More than three weeks, too?”

Anne considered for a moment.

“For God’s sake, be careful!” said Sir Pat-

rick. "You don't know what depends on this. If your memory is not clear about it, say so."

"My memory was confused for a moment. It is clear again now. He had been at his brother's in Perthshire three weeks before he wrote that. And before he went to Swanhaven, he spent three or four days in the valley of the Esk."

"Are you sure again?"

"Quite sure!"

"Do you know of any one who saw him in the valley of the Esk?"

"I know of a person who took a note to him from me."

"A person easily found?"

"Quite easily."

Sir Patrick laid aside the letter, and seized in ungovernable agitation on both her hands.

"Listen to me," he said. "The whole conspiracy against Arnold Brinkworth and you falls to the ground before that correspondence. When you and he met at the inn—"

He paused, and looked at her. Her hands were beginning to tremble in his.

"When you and Arnold Brinkworth met at the inn," he resumed, "the law of Scotland had made you a married woman. On the day, and at the hour, when he wrote those lines at the back of your letter to him, you were *Geoffrey Delamayn's wedded wife!*"

He stopped, and looked at her again.

Without a word in reply, without the slightest movement in her from head to foot, she looked back at him. The blank stillness of horror was

in her face. The deadly cold of horror was in her hands.

In silence, on his side, Sir Patrick drew back a step, with a faint reflection of *her* dismay in his face. Married—to the villain who had not hesitated to calumniate the woman whom he had ruined, and then to cast her helpless on the world. Married—to the traitor who had not shrunk from betraying Arnold's trust in him, and desolating Arnold's home. Married—to the ruffian who would have struck her that morning, if the hands of his own friends had not held him back. And Sir Patrick had never thought of it! Absorbed in the one idea of Blanche's future, he had never thought of it, till that horror-stricken face looked at him, and said, Think of *my* future, too!

He came back to her. He took her cold hand once more in his.

"Forgive me," he said, "for thinking first of Blanche."

Blanche's name seemed to rouse her. The life came back to her face; the tender brightness began to shine again in her eyes. He saw that he might venture to speak more plainly still: he went on.

"I see the dreadful sacrifice as *you* see it. I ask myself, have I any right, has Blanche any right—"

She stopped him by a faint pressure of his hand.

"Yes," she said, softly, "if Blanche's happiness depends on it."

THIRTEENTH SCENE.—FULHAM.

CHAPTER THE FORTY-FIFTH.

THE FOOT-RACE.

A SOLITARY foreigner, drifting about London, drifted toward Fulham on the day of the Foot-race.

Little by little, he found himself involved in the current of a throng of impetuous English people, all flowing together toward one given point, and all decorated alike with colors of two prevailing hues—pink and yellow. He drifted along with the stream of passengers on the pavement (accompanied by a stream of carriages in the road) until they stopped with one accord at a gate—and paid admission-money to a man in office—and poured into a great open space of ground which looked like an uncultivated garden.

Arrived here, the foreign visitor opened his eyes in wonder at the scene revealed to view. He observed thousands of people assembled, composed almost exclusively of the middle and upper classes of society. They were congregated round a vast inclosure; they were elevated on amphitheatrical wooden stands; and they were perched on the roofs of horseless carriages, drawn up in rows. From this congregation there rose such a roar of eager voices as he had never heard yet from any assembled multitude in these islands.

Predominating among the cries, he detected one everlasting question. It began with, "Who backs—?" and it ended in the alternate pronouncing of two British names unintelligible to foreign ears. Seeing these extraordinary sights, and hearing these stirring sounds, he applied to a policeman on duty; and said, in his best producible English, "If you please, sir, what is this?"

The policeman answered, "North against South—Sports."

The foreigner was informed, but not satisfied. He pointed all round the assembly with a circular sweep of his hand; and said, "Why?"

The policeman declined to waste words on a man who could ask such a question as that. He lifted a large purple forefinger, with a broad white nail at the end of it, and pointed gravely to a printed Bill, posted on the wall behind him. The drifting foreigner drifted to the Bill.

After reading it carefully, from top to bottom, he consulted a polite private individual near at hand, who proved to be far more communicative than the policeman. The result on his mind, as a person not thoroughly awakened to the enormous national importance of Athletic Sports, was much as follows:

The color of North is pink. The color of South is yellow. North produces fourteen pink men, and South produces thirteen yellow men. The meeting of pink and yellow is a solemnity. The solemnity takes its rise in an indomitable national passion for hardening the arms and legs,

by throwing hammers and cricket-balls with the first, and running and jumping with the second. The object in view is to do this in public rivalry. The ends arrived at are (physically) an excessive development of the muscles, purchased at the expense of an excessive strain on the heart and the lungs—(morally), glory; conferred at the moment by the public applause; confirmed the next day by a report in the newspapers. Any person who presumes to see any physical evil involved in these exercises to the men who practice them, or any moral obstruction in the exhibition itself to those civilizing influences on which the true greatness of all nations depends, is a person without a biceps, who is simply incomprehensible. Muscular England develops itself, and takes no notice of him.

The foreigner mixed with the assembly, and looked more closely at the social spectacle around him.

He had met with these people before. He had seen them (for instance) at the theater, and had observed their manners and customs with considerable curiosity and surprise. When the curtain was down, they were so little interested in what they had come to see, that they had hardly spirit enough to speak to each other between the acts. When the curtain was up, if the play made any appeal to their sympathy with any of the higher and nobler emotions of humanity, they received it as something wearisome, or sneered at it as something absurd. The public feeling of the countrymen of Shakespeare, so far

as they represented it, recognized but two duties in the dramatist—the duty of making them laugh, and the duty of getting it over soon. The two great merits of a stage proprietor, in England (judging by the rare applause of his cultivated customers), consisted in spending plenty of money on his scenery, and in hiring plenty of brazen-faced women to exhibit their bosoms and their legs. Not at theaters only; but among other gatherings, in other places, the foreigner had noticed the same stolid languor where any effort was exacted from genteel English brains, and the same stupid contempt where any appeal was made to genteel English hearts. Preserve us from enjoying anything but jokes and scandal! Preserve us from respecting anything but rank and money! There were the social aspiration of these insular ladies and gentlemen, as expressed under other circumstances, and as betrayed amid other scenes. Here all was changed. Here was the strong feeling, the breathless interest, the hearty enthusiasm, not visible elsewhere. Here were the superb gentlemen who were too weary to speak when an Art was addressing them, shouting themselves hoarse with burst on burst of genuine applause. Here were the fine ladies who yawned behind their fans at the bare idea of being called on to think or to feel, waving their handkerchiefs in honest delight, and actually flushing with excitement through their powder and their paint. And all for what? All for running and jumping—all for throwing hammers and balls.

The foreigner looked at it, and tried, as a citizen of a civilized country, to understand it. He was still trying—when there occurred a pause in the performances.

Certain hurdles, which had served to exhibit the present satisfactory state of civilization (in jumping) among the upper classes, were removed. The privileged persons who had duties to perform within the inclosure, looked all round it; and disappeared one after another. A great hush of expectation pervaded the whole assembly. Something of no common interest and importance was evidently about to take place. On a sudden, the silence was broken by a roar of cheering from the mob in the road outside the grounds. People looked at each other excitedly, and said, "One of them has come." The silence prevailed again—and was a second time broken by another roar of applause. People nodded to each other with an air of relief and said, "Both of them have come." Then the great hush fell on the crowd once more; and all eyes looked toward one particular point of the ground, occupied by a little wooden pavilion, with the blinds down over the open windows, and the door closed.

The foreigner was deeply impressed by the silent expectation of the great throng about him. He felt his own sympathies stirred, without knowing why. He believed himself to be on the point of understanding the English people.

Some ceremony of grave importance was evidently in preparation. Was a great orator going to address the assembly? Was a glorious anni-

versary to be commemorated? Was a religious service to be performed? He looked round him to apply for information once more. Two gentlemen—who contrasted favorably, so far as refinement of manner was concerned, with most of the spectators present—were slowly making their way, at that moment, through the crowd near him. He respectfully asked what national solemnity was now about to take place. They informed him that a pair of strong young men were going to run round the inclosure for a given number of turns, with the object of ascertaining which could run the fastest of the two.

The foreigner lifted his hands and eyes to heaven. Oh multifarious Providence! who would have suspected that the infinite diversities of thy creation included such beings as these! With that aspiration, he turned his back on the race-course, and left the place.

On his way out of the grounds he had occasion to use his handkerchief, and found that it was gone. He felt next for his purse. His purse was missing too. When he was back again in his own country, intelligent inquiries were addressed to him on the subject of England. He had but one reply to give. “The whole nation is a mystery to me. Of all the English people I only understand the English thieves!”

In the meantime the two gentlemen, making their way through the crowd, reached a wicket-gate in the fence which surrounded the inclosure.

Presenting a written order to the policeman in

charge of the gate, they were forthwith admitted within the sacred precincts. The closely packed spectators, regarding them with mixed feelings of envy and curiosity, wondered who they might be. Were they referees appointed to act at the coming race? or reporters for the newspapers? or commissioners of police? They were neither the one nor the other. They were only Mr. Speedwell, the surgeon, and Sir Patrick Lundie.

The two gentlemen walked into the center of the inclosure, and looked round them.

The grass on which they were standing was girdled by a broad smooth path, composed of finely-sifted ashes and sand—and this again was surrounded by the fence and by the spectators ranked behind it. Above the lines thus formed rose on one side the amphitheaters with their tiers of crowded benches, and on the other the long rows of carriages with the sightseers inside and out. The evening sun was shining brightly, the light and shade lay together in grand masses, the varied colors of objects blended softly one with the other. It was a splendid and an inspiring scene.

Sir Patrick turned from the rows of eager faces all round him to his friend the surgeon.

“Is there one person to be found in this vast crowd,” he asked, “who has come to see the race with the doubt in his mind which has brought *us* to see it?”

Mr. Speedwell shook his head. “Not one of

them knows or cares what the struggle may cost the men who engage in it.”

Sir Patrick looked round him again. “I almost wish I had not come to see it,” he said. “If this wretched man—”

The surgeon interposed. “Don’t dwell needlessly, Sir Patrick, on the gloomy view,” he rejoined. “The opinion I have formed has, thus far, no positive grounds to rest on. I am guessing rightly, as I believe, but at the same time I am guessing in the dark. Appearances *may* have misled me. There may be reserves of vital force in Mr. Delamayn’s constitution which I don’t suspect. I am here to learn a lesson—not to see a prediction fulfilled. I know his health is broken, and I believe he is going to run this race at his own proper peril. Don’t feel too sure beforehand of the event. The event may prove me to be wrong.”

For the moment Sir Patrick dropped the subject. He was not in his usual spirits.

Since his interview with Anne had satisfied him that she was Geoffrey’s lawful wife, the conviction had inevitably forced itself on his mind that the one possible chance for her in the future was the chance of Geoffrey’s death. Horrible as it was to him, he had been possessed by that one idea—go where he might, do what he might, struggle as he might to force his thoughts in other directions. He looked round the broad ashen path on which the race was to be run, conscious that he had a secret interest in it which it was unutterably repugnant to him to

feel. He tried to resume the conversation with his friend, and to lead it to other topics. The effort was useless. In despite of himself, he returned to the one fatal subject of the struggle that was now close at hand.

“How many times must they go round this inclosure,” he inquired, “before the race is ended?”

Mr. Speedwell turned toward a gentleman who was approaching them at the moment. “Here is somebody coming who can tell us,” he said.

“You know him?”

“He is one of my patients.”

“Who is he?”

“After the two runners he is the most important personage on the ground. He is the final authority—the umpire of the race.”

The person thus described was a middle-aged man, with a prematurely wrinkled face, with prematurely white hair, and with something of a military look about him—brief in speech, and quick in manner.

“The path measures four hundred and forty yards round,” he said, when the surgeon had repeated Sir Patrick’s question to him. “In plainer words, and not to put you to your arithmetic, once round it is a quarter of a mile. Each round is called a ‘Lap.’ The men must run sixteen Laps to finish the race. Not to put you to your arithmetic again, they must run four miles—the longest race of this kind which it is customary to attempt at sports like these.”

“Professional pedestrians exceed that limit, do they not?”

“Considerably—on certain occasions.”

“Are they a long-lived race?”

“Far from it. They are exceptions when they live to be old men.”

Mr. Speedwell looked at Sir Patrick. Sir Patrick put a question to the umpire.

“You have just told us,” he said, “that the two young men who appear to-day are going to run the longest distance yet attempted in their experience. Is it generally thought, by persons who understand such things, that they are both fit to bear the exertion demanded of them?”

“You can judge for yourself, sir. Here is one of them.”

He pointed toward the pavilion. At the same moment there rose a mighty clapping of hands from the great throng of spectators. Fleetwood, champion of the North, decorated in his pink colors, descended the pavilion steps and walked into the arena.

Young, lithe and elegant, with supple strength expressed in every movement of his limbs, with a bright smile on his resolute young face, the man of the North won the women’s hearts at starting. The murmur of eager talk rose among them on all sides. The men were quieter—especially the men who understood the subject. It was a serious question with these experts whether Fleetwood was not “a little too fine.” Superbly trained, it was admitted—but, possibly, a little *over-trained* for a four-mile race.

The Northern hero was followed into the in-

closure by his friends and backers, and by his trainer. This last carried a tin can in his hand. "Cold water," the umpire explained. "If he gets exhausted, his trainer will pick him up with a dash of it as he goes by."

A new burst of hand-clapping rattled all round the arena. Delamayn, champion of the South, decorated in his yellow colors, presented himself to the public view.

The immense hum of voices rose louder and louder as he walked into the center of the great green space. Surprise at the extraordinary contrast between the two men was the prevalent emotion of the moment. Geoffrey was more than a head taller than his antagonist, and broader in full proportion. The women, who had been charmed with the easy gait and confident smile of Fleetwood, were all more or less painfully impressed by the sullen strength of the Southern man, as he passed before them slowly, with his head down and his brows knit, deaf to the applause showered on him, reckless of the eyes that looked at him; speaking to nobody; concentrated in himself; biding his time. He held the men who understood the subject breathless with interest. There it was! the famous "staying power" that was to endure in the last terrible half-mile of the race, when the nimble and jaunty Fleetwood was run off his legs. Whispers had been spread abroad hinting at something which had gone wrong with Delamayn in his training. And now that all eyes could judge him, his appearance suggested criticism in some quarters. It

was exactly the opposite of the criticism passed on his antagonist. The doubt as to Delamayn was whether he had been sufficiently trained. Still the solid strength of the man, the slow, panther-like smoothness of his movements—and, above all, his great reputation in the world of muscle and sport—had their effect. The betting which, with occasional fluctuations, had held steadily in his favor thus far, held, now that he was publicly seen, steadily in his favor still. “Fleetwood for shorter distances, if you like; but Delamayn for a four-mile race.”

“Do you think he sees us?” whispered Sir Patrick to the surgeon.

“He sees nobody.”

“Can you judge of the condition he is in, at this distance?”

“He has twice the muscular strength of the other man. His trunk and limbs are magnificent. It is useless to ask me more than that about his condition. We are too far from him to see his face plainly.”

The conversation among the audience began to flag again; and the silent expectation set in among them once more. One by one the different persons officially connected with the race gathered together on the grass. The trainer Perry was among them, with his can of water in his hand, in anxious whispering conversation with his principal—giving him the last words of advice before the start. The trainer’s doctor, leaving them together, came up to pay his respects to his illustrious colleague.

“How has he got on since I was at Fulham?” asked Mr. Speedwell.

“First-rate, sir! It was one of his bad days when you saw him. He has done wonders in the last eight-and-forty hours.”

“Is he going to win the race?”

Privately the doctor had done what Perry had done before him—he had backed Geoffrey’s antagonist. Publicly he was true to his colors. He cast a disparaging look at Fleetwood—and answered Yes, without the slightest hesitation.

At that point, the conversation was suspended by a sudden movement in the inclosure. The runners were on their way to the starting-place. The moment of the race had come.

Shoulder to shoulder, the two men waited—each with his foot touching the mark. The firing of a pistol gave the signal for the start. At the instant when the report sounded they were off.

Fleetwood at once took the lead; Delamayn following, at from two to three yards behind him. In that order, they ran the first round, the second, the third—both reserving their strength; both watched with breathless interest by every soul in the place. The trainers, with their cans in their hands, ran backward and forward over the grass, meeting their men at certain points, and eying them narrowly, in silence. The official persons stood together in a group, their eyes following the runners round and round with the closest attention. The trainer’s doctor, still attached to his illustrious colleague, offered

the necessary explanations to Mr. Speedwell and his friend.

“Nothing much to see for the first mile, sir, except the ‘style’ of the two men.”

“You mean they are not really exerting themselves yet?”

“No; getting their wind, and feeling their legs. Pretty runner, Fleetwood—if you notice, sir? Gets his legs a trifle better in front, and hardly lifts his heels quite so high as our man. His action’s the best of the two; I grant that. But just look, as they come by, which keeps the straightest line. There’s where Delamayn has him! It’s a steadier, stronger, truer pace; and you’ll see it tell when they’re half-way through.” So, for the first three rounds, the doctor expatiated on the two contrasted “styles”—in terms mercifully adapted to the comprehension of persons unacquainted with the language of the running ring.

At the fourth round—in other words, at the round which completed the first mile, the first change in the relative position of the runners occurred. Delamayn suddenly dashed to the front. Fleetwood smiled as the other passed him. Delamayn held the lead till they were half way through the fifth round—when Fleetwood, at a hint from his trainer, forced the pace. He lightly passed Delamayn in an instant; and led again to the completion of the sixth round. At the opening of the seventh, Delamayn forced the pace on his side. For a few moments, they ran exactly abreast. Then Delamayn drew

away inch by inch; and recovered the lead. The first burst of applause (led by the South) rang out, as the big man beat Fleetwood at his own tactics, and headed him at the critical moment when the race was nearly half run.

“It begins to look as if Delamayn *was* going to win!” said Sir Patrick.

The trainer’s doctor forgot himself. Infected by the rising excitement of everybody about him, he let out the truth.

“Wait a bit!” he said. “Fleetwood has got directions to let him pass—Fleetwood is waiting to see what he can do.”

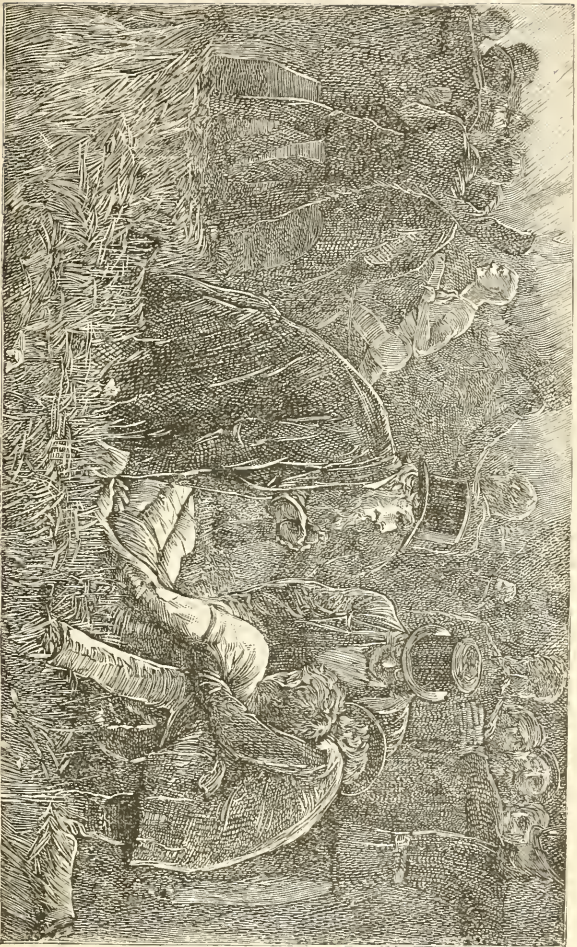
“Cunning, you see, Sir Patrick, is one of the elements in a manly sport,” said Mr. Speedwell, quietly.

At the end of the seventh round, Fleetwood proved the doctor to be right. He shot past Delamayn like an arrow from a bow. At the end of the eighth round, he was leading by two yards. Half the race had then been run. Time, ten minutes and thirty-three seconds.

Toward the end of the ninth round, the pace slackened a little; and Delamayn was in front again. He kept ahead, until the opening of the eleventh round. At that point, Fleetwood flung up one hand in the air with a gesture of triumph, and bounded past Delamayn with a shout of “Hooray for the North?” The shout was echoed by the spectators. In proportion as the exertion began to tell upon the men, so the excitement steadily rose among the people looking at them.

At the twelfth round, Fleetwood was leading by six yards. Cries of triumph rose among the adherents of the North, met by counter-cries of defiance from the South. At the next turn Delamayn resolutely lessened the distance between his antagonist and himself. At the opening of the fourteenth round, they were coming side by side. A few yards more, and Delamayn was in front again, amid a roar of applause from the whole public voice. Yet a few yards further, and Fleetwood neared him; passed him; dropped behind again; led again; and was passed again at the end of the round. The excitement rose to its highest pitch, as the runners—gasping for breath; with dark-flushed faces, and heaving breasts—alternately passed and repassed each other. Oaths were heard now as well as cheers. Women turned pale, and men set their teeth, as the last round but one began.

At the opening of it, Delamayn was still in advance. Before six yards more had been covered, Fleetwood betrayed the purpose of his running in the previous round, and electrified the whole assembly, by dashing past his antagonist—for the first time in the race at the top of his speed. Everybody present could see, now, that Delamayn had been allowed to lead on sufferance—had been dexterously drawn on to put out his whole power—and had then, and not till then, been seriously deprived of the lead. He made another effort, with a resolution that roused the public enthusiasm to frenzy. While the voices were roaring; while the hats and handkerchiefs



EVERYBODY WAITED, WITH THEIR EYES RIVETED ON THE SURGEON'S HAND.

—Man and Wife, Vol. Four, page 145.

were waving round the course; while the actual event of the race was, for one supreme moment, still in doubt—Mr. Speedwell caught Sir Patrick by the arm.

“Prepare yourself!” he whispered. “It’s all over.”

As the words passed his lips, Delamayn swerved on the path. His trainer dashed water over him. He rallied, and ran another step or two—swerved again—staggered—lifted his arm to his mouth with a hoarse cry of rage—fastened his own teeth in his flesh like a wild beast—and fell senseless on the course.

A babel of sounds arose. The cries of alarm in some places, mingling with the shouts of triumph from the backers of Fleetwood in others—as their man ran lightly on to win the now uncontested race. Not the inclosure only, but the course itself was invaded by the crowd. In the midst of the tumult the fallen man was drawn on to the grass—with Mr. Speedwell and the trainer’s doctor in attendance on him. At the terrible moment when the surgeon laid his hand on the heart, Fleetwood passed the spot—a passage being forced for him through the people by his friends and the police—running the sixteenth and last round of the race.

Had the beaten man fainted under it, or had he died under it? Everybody waited, with their eyes riveted on the surgeon’s hand.

The surgeon looked up from him, and called for water to throw over his face, for brandy to put into his mouth. He was coming to life

again—he had survived the race. The last shout of applause which hailed Fleetwood's victory rang out as they lifted him from the ground to carry him to the pavilion. Sir Patrick (admitted at Mr. Speedwell's request) was the one stranger allowed to pass the door. At the moment when he was ascending the steps, some one touched his arm. It was Captain Newenden.

“Do the doctors answer for his life?” asked the captain. “I can't get my niece to leave the ground till she is satisfied of that.”

Mr. Speedwell heard the question, and replied to it briefly from the top of the pavilion steps.

“For the present—yes,” he said.

The captain thanked him, and disappeared.

They entered the pavilion. The necessary restorative measures were taken under Mr. Speedwell's directions. There the conquered athlete lay: outwardly an inert mass of strength, formidable to look at, even in its fall; inwardly, a weaker creature, in all that constitutes vital force, than the fly that buzzed on the window-pane. By slow degrees the fluttering life came back. The sun was setting; and the evening light was beginning to fail. Mr. Speedwell beckoned to Perry to follow him into an unoccupied corner of the room.

“In half an hour or less he will be well enough to be taken home. Where are his friends? He has a brother—hasn't he?”

“His brother's in Scotland, sir.”

“His father?”

Perry scratched his head. "From all I hear, sir, he and his father don't agree."

Mr. Speedwell applied to Sir Patrick.

"Do you know anything of his family affairs?"

"Very little. I believe what the man has told you to be the truth."

"Is his mother living?"

"Yes."

"I will write to her myself. In the meantime, somebody must take him home. He has plenty of friends here. Where are they?"

He looked out of the window as he spoke. A throng of people had gathered round the pavilion, waiting to hear the latest news. Mr. Speedwell directed Perry to go out and search among them for any friends of his employer whom he might know by sight. Perry hesitated, and scratched his head for the second time.

"What are you waiting for?" asked the surgeon, sharply. "You know his friends by sight, don't you?"

"I don't think I shall find them outside," said Perry.

"Why not?"

"They backed him heavily, sir—and they have all lost."

Deaf to this unanswerable reason for the absence of friends, Mr. Speedwell insisted on sending Perry out to search among the persons who composed the crowd. The trainer returned with his report. "You were right, sir. There are some of his friends outside. They want to see him."

“Let two or three of them in.”

Three came in. They stared at him. They uttered brief expressions of pity in slang. They said to Mr. Speedwell, “We wanted to see him. What is it—eh?”

“It’s a break-down in his health.”

“Bad training?”

“Athletic Sports.”

“Oh! Thank you. Good-evening.”

Mr. Speedwell’s answer drove them out like a flock of sheep before a dog. There was not even time to put the question to them as to who was to take him home.

“I’ll look after him, sir,” said Perry. “You can trust me.”

“I’ll go, too,” added the trainer’s doctor; “and see him littered down for the night.”

(The only two men who had “hedged” their bets, by privately backing his opponent, were also the only two men who volunteered to take him home!)

They went back to the sofa on which he was lying. His bloodshot eyes were rolling heavily and vacantly about him, on the search for something. They rested on the doctor—and looked away again. They turned to Mr. Speedwell—and stopped, riveted on his face. The surgeon bent over him, and said, “What is it?”

He answered with a thick accent and laboring breath—uttering a word at a time: “Shall—I—die?”

“I hope not.”

“Sure?”

“No.”

He looked round him again. This time his eyes rested on the trainer. Perry came forward.

“What can I do for you, sir?”

The reply came slowly, as before. “My—coat—pocket.”

“This one, sir?”

“No.”

“This?”

“Yes. Book.”

The trainer felt in the pocket, and produced a betting-book.

“What’s to be done with this, sir?”

“Read.”

The trainer held the book before him; open at the last two pages on which entries had been made. He rolled his head impatiently from side to side of the sofa pillow. It was plain that he was not yet sufficiently recovered to be able to read what he had written.

“Shall I read for you, sir?”

“Yes.”

The trainer read three entries, one after another, without result; they had all been honestly settled. At the fourth the prostrate man said, “Stop!” This was the first of the entries which still depended on a future event. It recorded the wager laid at Windygates, when Geoffrey had backed himself (in defiance of the surgeon’s opinion) to row in the University boat-race next spring—and had forced Arnold Brinkworth to bet against him.

“Well, sir? What’s to be done about this?”

He collected his strength for the effort; and answered by a word at a time.

“Write—brother—Julius. Pay—Arnold—wins.”

His lifted hand, solemnly emphasizing what he said, dropped at his side. He closed his eyes and fell into a heavy, stertorous sleep. Give him his due. Scoundrel as he was, give him his due. The awful moment, when his life was trembling in the balance, found him true to the last living faith left among the men of his tribe and time—the faith of the betting-book.

Sir Patrick and Mr. Speedwell quitted the race-ground together; Geoffrey having been previously removed to his lodgings hard by. They met Arnold Brinkworth at the gate. He had, by his own desire, kept out of view among the crowd; and he decided on walking back by himself. The separation from Blanche had changed him in all his habits. He asked but two favors during the interval which was to elapse before he saw his wife again—to be allowed to bear it in his own way, and to be left alone.

Relieved of the oppression which had kept him silent while the race was in progress, Sir Patrick put a question to the surgeon as they drove home, which had been in his mind from the moment when Geoffrey had lost the day.

“I hardly understand the anxiety you showed about Delamayn,” he said, “when you found that he had only fainted under the fatigue. Was

it something more than a common fainting-fit?"

"It is useless to conceal it now," replied Mr. Speedwell. "He has had a narrow escape from a paralytic stroke."

"Was that what you dreaded when you spoke to him at Windygates?"

"That was what I saw in his face when I gave him the warning. I was right, so far. I was wrong in my estimate of the reserve of vital power left in him. When he dropped on the race-course, I firmly believed we should find him a dead man."

"Is it hereditary paralysis? His father's last illness was of that sort."

Mr. Speedwell smiled. "Hereditary paralysis?" he repeated. "Why the man is (naturally) a phenomenon of health and strength—in the prime of his life. Hereditary paralysis might have found him out thirty years hence. His rowing and his running, for the last four years, are alone answerable for what has happened to-day."

Sir Patrick ventured on a suggestion.

"Surely," he said, "with your name to compel attention to it, you ought to make this public—as a warning to others?"

"It would be quite useless. Delamayn is far from being the first man who has dropped at foot-racing, under the cruel stress laid on the vital organs. The public have a happy knack of forgetting these accidents. They would be quite satisfied when they found the other man (who

happens to have got through it) produced as a sufficient answer to me.”

Anne Silvester's future was still dwelling on Sir Patrick's mind. His next inquiry related to the serious subject of Geoffrey's prospect of recovery in the time to come.

“He will never recover,” said Mr. Speedwell. “Paralysis is hanging over him. How long he may live it is impossible for me to say. Much depends on himself. In his condition, any new imprudence, any violent emotion, may kill him at a moment's notice.”

“If no accident happens,” said Sir Patrick, “will he be sufficiently himself again to leave his bed and go out?”

“Certainly.”

“He has an appointment that I know of for Saturday next. Is it likely that he will be able to keep it?”

“Quite likely.”

Sir Patrick said no more. Anne's face was before him again at the memorable moment when he had told her that she was Geoffrey's wife.

*FOURTEENTH SCENE.—PORTLAND
PLACE.*

CHAPTER THE FORTY-SIXTH.

A SCOTCH MARRIAGE.

IT was Saturday, the third of October—the day on which the assertion of Arnold's marriage to Anne Silvester was to be put to the proof.

Toward two o'clock in the afternoon Blanche and her stepmother entered the drawing-room of Lady Lundie's town-house in Portland Place.

Since the previous evening the weather had altered for the worse. The rain, which had set in from an early hour that morning, still fell. Viewed from the drawing-room windows, the desolation of Portland Place in the dead season wore its aspect of deepest gloom. The dreary opposite houses were all shut up; the black mud was inches deep in the roadway; the soot, floating in tiny black particles, mixed with the falling rain, and heightened the dirty obscurity of the rising mist. Foot-passengers and vehicles, succeeding each other at rare intervals, left great gaps of silence absolutely uninterrupted by sound. Even the grinders of organs were mute; and the wandering dogs of the street were too wet to bark. Looking back from the view out of Lady
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Lundie's state windows to the view in Lady Lundie's state room, the melancholy that reigned without was more than matched by the melancholy that reigned within. The house had been shut up for the season: it had not been considered necessary, during its mistress's brief visit, to disturb the existing state of things. Coverings of dim brown hue shrouded the furniture. The chandeliers hung invisible in enormous bags. The silent clocks hibernated under extinguishers dropped over them two months since. The tables, drawn up in corners—loaded with ornaments at other times—had nothing but pen, ink and paper (suggestive of the coming proceedings) placed on them now. The smell of the house was musty; the voice of the house was still. One melancholy maid haunted the bedrooms upstairs like a ghost. One melancholy man, appointed to admit the visitors, sat solitary in the lower regions—the last of the flunkies, mouldering in an extinct servants' hall. Not a word passed, in the drawing-room, between Lady Lundie and Blanche. Each waited the appearance of the persons concerned in the coming inquiry, absorbed in her own thoughts. Their situation at the moment was a solemn burlesque of the situation of two ladies who are giving an evening party, and who are waiting to receive their guests. Did neither of them see this? Or, seeing it, did they shrink from acknowledging it? In similar positions, who does not shrink? The occasions are many on which we have excellent reason to laugh when the

tears are in our eyes; but only children are bold enough to follow the impulse. So strangely, in human existence, does the mockery of what is serious mingle with the serious reality itself, that nothing but our own self-respect preserves our gravity at some of the most important emergencies in our lives. The two ladies waited the coming ordeal together gravely, as became the occasion. The silent maid flitted noiseless upstairs. The silent man waited motionless in the lower regions. Outside, the street was a desert. Inside, the house was a tomb.

The church clock struck the hour. Two.

At the same moment the first of the persons concerned in the investigation arrived.

Lady Lundie waited composedly for the opening of the drawing-room door. Blanche started, and trembled. Was it Arnold? Was it Anne?

The door opened, and Blanche drew a breath of relief. The first arrival was only Lady Lundie's solicitor—invited to attend the proceedings on her ladyship's behalf. He was one of that large class of purely mechanical and perfectly mediocre persons connected with the practice of the law who will probably, in a more advanced state of science, be superseded by machinery. He made himself useful in altering the arrangement of the tables and chairs, so as to keep the contending parties effectually separated from each other. He also entreated Lady Lundie to bear in mind that he knew nothing of Scotch law, and that he was there in the capacity of friend only. This done, he sat down, and looked

out with silent interest at the rain—as if it was an operation of Nature which he had never had an opportunity of inspecting before.

The next knock at the door heralded the arrival of a visitor of a totally different order. The melancholy man-servant announced Captain Newenden.

Possibly in deference to the occasion, possibly in defiance of the weather, the captain had taken another backward step toward the days of his youth. He was painted and padded, wigged and dressed, to represent the abstract idea of a male human being of five-and-twenty in robust health. There might have been a little stiffness in the region of the waist, and a slight want of firmness in the eyelid and the chin. Otherwise there was the fiction of five-and-twenty, founded in appearance on the fact of five-and-thirty—with the truth invisible behind it, counting seventy years! Wearing a flower in his buttonhole, and carrying a jaunty little cane in his hand—brisk, rosy, smiling, perfumed—the captain's appearance brightened the dreary room. It was pleasantly suggestive of a morning visit from an idle young man. He appeared to be a little surprised to find Blanche present on the scene of approaching conflict. Lady Lundie thought it due to herself to explain. "My stepdaughter is here in direct defiance of my entreaties and my advice. Persons may present themselves whom it is, in my opinion, improper she should see. Revelations will take place which no young woman, in her position, should hear. She insists

on it, Captain Newenden—and I am obliged to submit.”

The captain shrugged his shoulders, and showed his beautiful teeth.

Blanche was far too deeply interested in the coming ordeal to care to defend herself: she looked as if she had not even heard what her stepmother had said of her. The solicitor remained absorbed in the interesting view of the falling rain. Lady Lundie asked after Mrs. Glenarm. The captain, in reply, described his niece's anxiety as something—something—something, in short, only to be indicated by shaking his ambrosial curls and waving his jaunty cane. Mrs. Delamayn was staying with her until her uncle returned with the news. And where was Julius? Detained in Scotland by election business. And Lord and Lady Holchester? Lord and Lady Holchester knew nothing about it.

There was another knock at the door. Blanche's pale face turned paler still. Was it Arnold? Was it Anne? After a longer delay than usual the servant announced Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn and Mr. Moy.

Geoffrey, slowly entering first, saluted the two ladies in silence, and noticed no one else. The London solicitor, withdrawing himself for a moment from the absorbing prospect of the rain, pointed to the places reserved for the new-comer and for the legal adviser whom he had brought with him. Geoffrey seated himself, without so much as a glance round the room. Leaning his elbows on his knees, he vacantly traced patterns

on the carpet with his clumsy oaken walking-stick. Stolid indifference expressed itself in his lowering brow and his loosely-hanging mouth. The loss of the race, and the circumstances accompanying it, appeared to have made him duller than usual and heavier than usual—and that was all.

Captain Newenden, approaching to speak to him, stopped half way, hesitated, thought better of it—and addressed himself to Mr. Moy.

Geoffrey's legal adviser—a Scotchman of the ruddy, ready and convivial type—cordially met the advance. He announced, in reply to the captain's inquiry, that the witnesses (Mrs. Inchbare and Bishopriggs) were waiting below until they were wanted, in the housekeeper's room. Had there been any difficulty in finding them? Not the least. Mrs. Inchbare was, as a matter of course, at her hotel. Inquiries being set on foot for Bishopriggs, it appeared that he and the landlady had come to an understanding, and that he had returned to his old post of head-waiter at the inn. The captain and Mr. Moy kept up the conversation between them, thus begun, with unflagging ease and spirit. Theirs were the only voices heard in the trying interval that elapsed before the next knock was heard at the door.

At last it came. There could be no doubt now as to the persons who might next be expected to enter the room. Lady Lundie took her step-daughter firmly by the hand. She was not sure of what Blanche's first impulse might lead her

to do. For the first time in her life, Blanche left her hand willingly in her stepmother's grasp.

The door opened, and they came in.

Sir Patrick Lundie entered first, with Anne Silvester on his arm. Arnold Brinkworth followed them.

Both Sir Patrick and Anne bowed in silence to the persons assembled. Lady Lundie ceremoniously returned her brother-in-law's salute, and pointedly abstained from noticing Anne's presence in the room. Blanche never looked up. Arnold advanced to her, with his hand held out. Lady Lundie rose, and motioned him back. "Not *yet*, Mr. Brinkworth!" she said, in her most quietly merciless manner. Arnold stood, heedless of her, looking at his wife. His wife lifted her eyes to his; the tears rose in them on the instant. Arnold's dark complexion turned ashy pale under the effort that it cost him to command himself. "I won't distress you," he said, gently—and turned back again to the table at which Sir Patrick and Anne were seated together, apart from the rest. Sir Patrick took his hand, and pressed it in silent approval.

The one person who took no part, even as spectator, in the events that followed the appearance of Sir Patrick and his companions in the room—was Geoffrey. The only change visible in him was a change in the handling of his walking-stick. Instead of tracing patterns on the carpet, it beat a tattoo. For the rest, there he sat with his heavy head on his breast and his

brawny arms on his knees—weary of it by anticipation before it had begun.

Sir Patrick broke the silence. He addressed himself to his sister-in-law.

“Lady Lundie, are all the persons present whom you expected to see here to-day?”

The gathered venom in Lady Lundie seized the opportunity of planting its first sting.

“All whom I expected are here,” she answered. “And more than I expected,” she added, with a look at Anne.

The look was not returned—was not even seen. From the moment when she had taken her place by Sir Patrick, Anne’s eyes had rested on Blanche. They never moved—they never for an instant lost their tender sadness—when the woman who hated her spoke. All that was beautiful and true in that noble nature seemed to find its one sufficient encouragement in Blanche. As she looked once more at the sister of the forgotten days of old, its native beauty of expression shone out again in her worn and weary face. Every man in the room (but Geoffrey) looked at her; and every man (but Geoffrey) felt for her.

Sir Patrick addressed a second question to his sister-in-law.

“Is there any one here to represent the interests of Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn?” he asked.

Lady Lundie referred Sir Patrick to Geoffrey himself. Without looking up, Geoffrey motioned with his big brown hand to Mr. Moy, sitting by his side.

Mr. Moy (holding the legal rank in Scotland

which corresponds to the rank held by solicitors in England) rose and bowed to Sir Patrick, with the courtesy due to a man eminent in his time at the Scottish Bar.

“I represent Mr. Delamayn,” he said. “I congratulate myself, Sir Patrick, on having your ability and experience to appeal to in the conduct of the pending inquiry.”

Sir Patrick returned the compliment as well as the bow.

“It is I who should learn from you,” he answered. “*I* have had time, Mr. Moy, to forget what I once knew.”

Lady Lundie looked from one to the other with unconcealed impatience as these formal courtesies were exchanged between the lawyers. “Allow me to remind you, gentlemen, of the suspense that we are suffering at this end of the room,” she said; “and permit me to ask when you propose to begin?”

Sir Patrick looked invitingly at Mr. Moy. Mr. Moy looked invitingly at Sir Patrick. More formal courtesies! a polite contest this time as to which of the two learned gentlemen should permit the other to speak first! Mr. Moy’s modesty proving to be quite immovable, Sir Patrick ended it by opening the proceedings.

“I am here,” he said, “to act on behalf of my friend, Mr. Arnold Brinkworth. I beg to present him to you, Mr. Moy, as the husband of my niece—to whom he was lawfully married on the seventh of September last, at the Church of Saint Margaret, in the parish of Hawley, Kent. I

have a copy of the marriage certificate here—if you wish to look at it.”

Mr. Moy's modesty declined to look at it.

“Quite needless, Sir Patrick! I admit that a marriage ceremony took place on the date named, between the persons named; but I contend that it was not a valid marriage. I say, on behalf of my client here present (Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn), that Arnold Brinkworth was married at a date prior to the seventh of September last—namely, on the fourteenth of August in this year, and at a place called Craig Fernie, in Scotland—to a lady named Anne Silvester, now living, and present among us (as I understand) at this moment.”

Sir Patrick presented Anne. “This is the lady, Mr. Moy.”

Mr. Moy bowed, and made a suggestion. “To save needless formalities, Sir Patrick, shall we take the question of identity as established on both sides?”

Sir Patrick agreed with his learned friend. Lady Lundie opened and shut her fan in undisguised impatience. The London solicitor was deeply interested. Captain Newenden, taking out his handkerchief, and using it as a screen, yawned behind it to his heart's content. Sir Patrick resumed.

“You assert the prior marriage,” he said to his colleague. “It rests with you to begin.”

Mr. Moy cast a preliminary look around him at the persons assembled.

“The object of our meeting here,” he said,

“is, if I am not mistaken, of a twofold nature. In the first place, it is thought desirable, by a person who has a special interest in the issue of this inquiry” (he glanced at the captain—the captain suddenly became attentive), “to put my client’s assertion, relating to Mr. Brinkworth’s marriage, to the proof. In the second place, we are all equally desirous—whatever difference of opinion may otherwise exist—to make this informal inquiry a means, if possible, of avoiding the painful publicity which would result from an appeal to a Court of Law.”

At those words the gathered venom in Lady Lundie planted its second sting—under cover of a protest addressed to Mr. Moy.

“I beg to inform you, sir, on behalf of my stepdaughter,” she said, “that we have nothing to dread from the widest publicity. We consent to be present at, what you call, ‘this informal inquiry,’ reserving our right to carry the matter beyond the four walls of this room. I am not referring now to Mr. Brinkworth’s chance of clearing himself from an odious suspicion which rests upon him and upon another Person present. That is an after-matter. The object immediately before us—so far as a woman can pretend to understand it—is to establish my stepdaughter’s right to call Mr. Brinkworth to account in the character of his wife. If the result, so far, fails to satisfy us in that particular, we shall not hesitate to appeal to a Court of Law.” She leaned back in her chair, and opened her fan, and looked round her with the air of a woman who called

society to witness that she had done her duty.

An expression of pain crossed Blanche's face while her stepmother was speaking. Lady Lundie took her hand for the second time. Blanche resolutely and pointedly withdrew it—Sir Patrick noticing the action with special interest. Before Mr. Moy could say a word in answer, Arnold centered the general attention on himself by suddenly interfering in the proceedings. Blanche looked at him. A bright flush of color appeared on her face—and left it again. Sir Patrick noted the change of color—and observed her more attentively than ever. Arnold's letter to his wife, with time to help it, had plainly shaken her ladyship's influence over Blanche.

“After what Lady Lundie has said, in my wife's presence,” Arnold burst out, in his straightforward, boyish way, “I think I ought to be allowed to say a word on my side. I only want to explain how it was I came to go to Craig Fernie at all—and I challenge Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn to deny it, if he can.”

His voice rose at the last words, and his eyes brightened with indignation as he looked at Geoffrey.

Mr. Moy appealed to his learned friend.

“With submission, Sir Patrick, to your better judgment,” he said, “this young gentleman's proposal seems to be a little out of place at the present stage of the proceedings.”

“Pardon me,” answered Sir Patrick. “You have yourself described the proceedings as repre-

senting an informal inquiry. An informal proposal—with submission to *your* better judgment, Mr. Moy—is hardly out of place, under those circumstances, is it?”

Mr. Moy's inexhaustible modesty gave way without a struggle. The answer which he received had the effect of puzzling him at the outset of the investigation. A man of Sir Patrick's experience must have known that Arnold's mere assertion of his own innocence could be productive of nothing but useless delay in the proceedings. And yet he sanctioned that delay. Was he privately on the watch for any accidental circumstance which might help him to better a case that he knew to be a bad one?

Permitted to speak, Arnold spoke. The unmistakable accent of truth was in every word that he uttered. He gave a fairly coherent account of events, from the time when Geoffrey had claimed his assistance at the lawn-party to the time when he found himself at the door of the inn at Craig Fernie. There Sir Patrick interfered, and closed his lips. He asked leave to appeal to Geoffrey to confirm him. Sir Patrick amazed Mr. Moy by sanctioning this irregularity also. Arnold sternly addressed himself to Geoffrey.

“Do you deny that what I have said is true?” he asked.

Mr. Moy did his duty by his client. “You are not bound to answer,” he said, “unless you wish it yourself.”

Geoffrey slowly lifted his heavy head, and con-

fronted the man whom he had betrayed. "I deny every word of it," he answered—with a stolid defiance of tone and manner.

"Have we had enough of assertion and counter-assertion, Sir Patrick, by this time?" asked Mr. Moy, with undiminished politeness.

After first forcing Arnold—with some little difficulty—to control himself, Sir Patrick raised Mr. Moy's astonishment to the culminating point. For reasons of his own, he determined to strengthen the favorable impression which Arnold's statement had plainly produced on his wife before the inquiry proceeded a step further.

"I must throw myself on your indulgence, Mr. Moy," he said. "I have not had enough of assertion and counter-assertion, even yet."

Mr. Moy leaned back in his chair with a mixed expression of bewilderment and resignation. Either his colleague's intellect was in a failing state, or his colleague had some purpose in view which had not openly asserted itself yet. He began to suspect that the right reading of the riddle was involved in the latter of those two alternatives. Instead of entering any fresh protest, he wisely waited and watched.

Sir Patrick went on unblushingly from one irregularity to another.

"I request Mr. Moy's permission to revert to the alleged marriage, on the fourteenth of August, at Craig Fernie," he said. "Arnold Brinkworth! answer for yourself, in the presence of the persons here assembled. In all that you said, and all that you did, while you were

at the inn, were you not solely influenced by the wish to make Miss Silvester's position as little painful to her as possible, and by anxiety to carry out the instructions given to you by Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn? Is that the whole truth?"

"That is the whole truth, Sir Patrick."

"On the day when you went to Craig Fernie, had you not, a few hours previously, applied for my permission to marry my niece?"

"I applied for your permission, Sir Patrick, and you gave it me?"

"From the moment when you entered the inn to the moment when you left it, were you absolutely innocent of the slightest intention to marry Miss Silvester?"

"No such thing as the thought of marrying Miss Silvester ever entered my head."

"And this you say, on your word of honor as a gentleman?"

"On my word of honor as a gentleman."

Sir Patrick turned to Anne.

"Was it a matter of necessity, Miss Silvester, that you should appear in the assumed character of a married woman—on the fourteenth of August last, at the Craig Fernie inn?"

Anne looked away from Blanche for the first time. She replied to Sir Patrick quietly, readily, firmly—Blanche looking at her, and listening to her with eager interest.

"I went to the inn alone, Sir Patrick. The landlady refused, in the plainest terms, to let me stay there unless she was first satisfied that I was a married woman."

“Which of the two gentlemen did you expect to join you at the inn—Mr. Arnold Brinkworth, or Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn?”

“Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn.”

“When Mr. Arnold Brinkworth came in his place, and said what was necessary to satisfy the scruples of the landlady, you understood that he was acting in your interests, from motives of kindness only, and under the instructions of Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn?”

“I understood that; and I objected as strongly as I could to Mr. Brinkworth placing himself in a false position on my account.”

“Did your objection proceed from any knowledge of the Scottish law of marriage, and of the position in which the peculiarities of that law might place Mr. Brinkworth?”

“I had no knowledge of the Scottish law. I had a vague dislike and dread of the deception which Mr. Brinkworth was practicing on the people of the inn. And I feared that it might lead to some possible misinterpretation of me on the part of a person whom I dearly loved.”

“That person being my niece?”

“Yes.”

“You appealed to Mr. Brinkworth (knowing of his attachment to my niece), in her name, and for her sake, to leave you to shift for yourself?”

“I did.”

“As a gentleman who had given his promise to help and protect a lady, in the absence of the person whom she had depended on to join her, he refused to leave you to shift for yourself?”

“Unhappily, he refused on that account.”

“From first to last you were absolutely innocent of the slightest intention to marry Mr. Brinkworth?”

“I answer, Sir Patrick, as Mr. Brinkworth has answered. No such thing as the thought of marrying him ever entered my head.”

“And this you say, on your oath as a Christian woman?”

“On my oath as a Christian woman.”

Sir Patrick looked round at Blanche. Her face was hidden in her hands. Her stepmother was vainly appealing to her to compose herself.

In the moment of silence that followed, Mr. Moy interfered in the interests of his client.

“I waive my claim, Sir Patrick, to put any questions on my side. I merely desire to remind you, and to remind the company present, that all that we have just heard is mere assertion—on the part of two persons strongly interested in extricating themselves from a position which fatally compromises them both. The marriage which they deny I am now waiting to prove—not by assertion, on my side, but by appeal to competent witnesses.”

After a brief consultation with her own solicitor, Lady Lundie followed Mr. Moy, in stronger language still.

“I wish you to understand, Sir Patrick, before you proceed any further, that I shall remove my stepdaughter from the room if any more attempts are made to harrow her feelings and mislead her judgment. I want words to express

my sense of this most cruel and unfair way of conducting the inquiry."

The London lawyer followed, stating his professional approval of his client's view. "As her ladyship's legal adviser," he said, "I support the protest which her ladyship has just made."

Even Captain Newenden agreed in the general disapproval of Sir Patrick's conduct. "Hear, hear!" said the captain, when the lawyer had spoken. "Quite right. I must say, quite right."

Apparently impenetrable to all due sense of his position, Sir Patrick addressed himself to Mr. Moy, as if nothing had happened.

"Do you wish to produce your witnesses at once?" he asked. "I have not the least objection to meet your views—on the understanding that I am permitted to return to the proceedings as interrupted at this point."

Mr. Moy considered. The adversary (there could be no doubt of it by this time) had something in reserve—and the adversary had not yet shown his hand. It was more immediately important to lead him into doing this than to insist on rights and privileges of the purely formal sort. Nothing could shake the strength of the position which Mr. Moy occupied. The longer Sir Patrick's irregularities delayed the proceedings, the more irresistibly the plain facts of the case would assert themselves—with all the force of contrast—out of the mouths of the witnesses who were in attendance downstairs. He determined to wait.

“Reserving my right of objection, Sir Patrick,” he answered, “I beg you to go on.”

To the surprise of everybody, Sir Patrick addressed himself directly to Blanche—quoting the language in which Lady Lundie had spoken to him, with perfect composure of tone and manner.

“You know me well enough, my dear,” he said, “to be assured that I am incapable of willingly harrowing your feelings or misleading your judgment. I have a question to ask you, which you can answer or not, entirely as you please.”

Before he could put the question there was a momentary contest between Lady Lundie and her legal adviser. Silencing her ladyship (not without difficulty), the London lawyer interposed. He also begged leave to reserve the right of objection, so far as *his* client was concerned.

Sir Patrick assented by a sign, and proceeded to put his question to Blanche.

“You have heard what Arnold Brinkworth has said, and what Miss Silvester has said,” he resumed. “The husband who loves you, and the sisterly friend who loves you, have each made a solemn declaration. Recall your past experience of both of them; remember what they have just said; and now tell me—do you believe they have spoken falsely?”

Blanche answered on the instant.

“I believe, uncle, they have spoken the truth!”

Both the lawyers registered their objections. Lady Lundie made another attempt to speak, and was stopped once more—this time by Mr.

Moy as well as by her own adviser. Sir Patrick went on.

“Do you feel any doubt as to the entire propriety of your husband’s conduct and your friend’s conduct, now you have seen them and heard them, face to face?”

Blanche answered again, with the same absence of reserve.

“I ask them to forgive me,” she said. “I believe I have done them both a great wrong.”

She looked at her husband first — then at Anne. Arnold attempted to leave his chair. Sir Patrick firmly restrained him. “Wait!” he whispered. “You don’t know what is coming.” Having said that, he turned toward Anne. Blanche’s look had gone to the heart of the faithful woman who loved her. Anne’s face was turned away—the tears were forcing themselves through the worn, weak hands that tried vainly to hide them.

The formal objections of the lawyers were registered once more. Sir Patrick addressed himself to his niece for the last time.

“You believe what Arnold Brinkworth has said; you believe what Miss Silvester has said. You know that not even the thought of marriage was in the mind of either of them at the inn. You know—whatever else may happen in the future—that there is not the most remote possibility of either of them consenting to acknowledge that they ever have been, or ever can be, Man and Wife. Is that enough for you? Are you willing, before this inquiry proceeds

any further, to take your husband's hand; to return to your husband's protection; and to leave the rest to me—satisfied with my assurance that, on the facts as they happened, not even the Scotch Law can prove the monstrous assertion of the marriage at Craig Fernie to be true?"

Lady Lundie rose. Both the lawyers rose. Arnold sat lost in astonishment. Geoffrey himself—brutishly careless thus far of all that had passed—lifted his head with a sudden start. In the midst of the profound impression thus produced, Blanche, on whose decision the whole future course of the inquiry now turned, answered in these words:

"I hope you will not think me ungrateful, uncle. I am sure that Arnold has not knowingly done me any wrong. But I can't go back to him until I am first *certain* that I am his wife."

Lady Lundie embraced her stepdaughter, with a sudden outburst of affection. "My dear child!" exclaimed her ladyship, fervently. "Well done, my own dear child!"

Sir Patrick's head dropped on his breast. "Oh, Blanche! Blanche!" Arnold heard him whisper to himself; "if you only knew what you are forcing me to!"

Mr. Moy put in his word, on Blanche's side of the question.

"I must most respectfully express my approval also of the course which the young lady has taken," he said. "A more dangerous compromise than the compromise which we have just

heard suggested it is difficult to imagine. With all deference to Sir Patrick Lundie, his opinion of the impossibility of proving the marriage at Craig Fernie remains to be confirmed as the right one. My own professional opinion is opposed to it. The opinion of another Scottish lawyer (in Glasgow) is, to my certain knowledge, opposed to it. If the young lady had not acted with a wisdom and courage which do her honor, she might have lived to see the day when her reputation would have been destroyed, and her children declared illegitimate. Who is to say that circumstances may not hapen in the future which may force Mr. Brinkworth or Miss Silvester—one or the other—to assert the very marriage which they repudiate now? Who is to say that interested relatives (property being concerned here) may not, in the lapse of years, discover motives of their own for questioning the asserted marriage in Kent? I acknowledge that I envy the immense self-confidence which emboldens Sir Patrick to venture, what he is willing to venture upon his own individual opinion on an undecided point of law.”

He sat down amid a murmur of approval, and cast a slyly-expectant look at his defeated adversary. “If *that* doesn’t irritate him into showing his hand,” thought Mr. Moy, “nothing will!”

Sir Patrick slowly raised his head. There was no irritation—there was only distress in his face—when he spoke next.

“I don’t propose, Mr. Moy, to argue the point

with you," he said, gently. "I can understand that my conduct must necessarily appear strange and even blameworthy, not in your eyes only, but in the eyes of others. My young friend here will tell you" (he looked toward Arnold) "that the view which you express as to the future peril involved in this case was once the view in my mind too, and that in what I have done thus far I have acted in direct contradiction to advice which I myself gave at no very distant period. Excuse me, if you please, from entering (for the present at least) into the motive which has influenced me from the time when I entered this room. My position is one of unexampled responsibility and of indescribable distress. May I appeal to that statement to stand as my excuse, if I plead for a last extension of indulgence toward the last irregularity of which I shall be guilty, in connection with these proceedings?"

Lady Lundie alone resisted the unaffected and touching dignity with which those words were spoken.

"We have had enough of irregularity," she said, sternly. "I, for one, object to more."

Sir Patrick waited patiently for Mr. Moy's reply. The Scotch lawyer and the English lawyer looked at each other—and understood each other. Mr. Moy answered for both.

"We don't presume to restrain you, Sir Patrick, by other limits than those which, as a gentleman, you impose on yourself. Subject," added the cautious Scotchman, "to the right of objection which we have already reserved."

“Do you object to my speaking to your client?” asked Sir Patrick.

“To Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn?”

“Yes.”

All eyes turned on Geoffrey. He was sitting half asleep, as it seemed—with his heavy hands hanging listlessly over his knees, and his chin resting on the hooked handle of his stick.

Looking toward Anne, when Sir Patrick pronounced Geoffrey’s name, Mr. Moy saw a change in her. She withdrew her hands from her face and turned suddenly toward her legal adviser. Was she in the secret of the carefully concealed object at which his opponent had been aiming from the first? Mr. Moy decided to put that doubt to the test. He invited Sir Patrick, by a gesture, to proceed. Sir Patrick addressed himself to Geoffrey.

“You are seriously interested in this inquiry,” he said; “and you have taken no part in it yet. Take a part in it now. Look at this lady.”

Geoffrey never moved.

“I’ve seen enough of her already,” he said, brutally.

“You may well be ashamed to look at her,” said Sir Patrick, quietly. “But you might have acknowledged it in fitter words. Carry your memory back to the fourteenth of August. Do you deny that you promised to marry Miss Silvester privately at the Craig Fernie inn?”

“I object to that question,” said Mr. Moy. “My client is under no sort of obligation to answer it.”

Geoffrey's rising temper—ready to resent anything—resented his adviser's interference. "I shall answer if I like," he retorted, insolently. He looked up for a moment at Sir Patrick, without moving his chin from the hook of his stick. Then he looked down again. "I do deny it," he said.

"You deny that you have promised to marry Miss Silvester?"

"Yes."

"I asked you just now to look at her—"

"And I told you I had seen enough of her already."

"Look at *me*. In my presence, and in the presence of the other persons here, do you deny that you owe this lady, by your own solemn engagement, the reparation of marriage?"

He suddenly lifted his head. His eyes, after resting for an instant only on Sir Patrick, turned, little by little, and, brightening slowly, fixed themselves with a hideous, tigerish glare on Anne's face. "I know what I owe her," he said.

The devouring hatred of his look was matched by the ferocious vindictiveness of his tone, as he spoke those words. It was horrible to see him; it was horrible to hear him. Mr. Moy said to him, in a whisper, "Control yourself, or I will throw up your case."

Without answering—without even listening—he lifted one of his hands, and looked at it vacantly. He whispered something to himself; and counted out what he was whispering slowly;

in divisions of his own, on three of his fingers in succession. He fixed his eyes again on Anne, with the same devouring hatred in their look, and spoke (this time directly addressing himself to her) with the same ferocious vindictiveness in his tone. "But for you, I should be married to Mrs. Glenarm. But for you, I should be friends with my father. But for you, I should have won the race. I know what I owe you." His loosely hanging hands stealthily clinched themselves. His head sank again on his broad breast. He said no more.

Not a soul moved—not a word was spoken. The same common horror held them all speechless. Anne's eyes turned once more on Blanche. Anne's courage upheld her, even at that moment.

Sir Patrick rose. The strong emotion which he had suppressed thus far showed itself plainly in his face—uttered itself plainly in his voice.

"Come into the next room," he said to Anne. "I must speak to you instantly!"

Without noticing the astonishment that he caused; without paying the smallest attention to the remonstrances addressed to him by his sister-in-law and by the Scotch lawyer, he took Anne by the arm—opened the folding-doors at one end of the room—entered the room beyond with her—and closed the doors again.

Lady Lundie appealed to her legal adviser. Blanche rose—advanced a few steps—and stood in breathless suspense, looking at the folding-doors. Arnold advanced a step, to speak to his wife. The captain approached Mr. Moy.

“What does this mean?” he asked.

Mr. Moy answered, in strong agitation on his side:

“It means that I have not been properly instructed. Sir Patrick Lundie has some evidence in his possession that seriously compromises Mr. Delamayn’s case. He has shrunk from producing it hitherto—he finds himself forced to produce it now. How is it,” asked the lawyer, turning sternly on his client, “that you have left me in the dark?”

“I know nothing about it,” answered Geoffrey, without lifting his head.

Lady Lundie signed to Blanche to stand aside and advanced toward the folding-doors. Mr. Moy stopped her.

“I advise your ladyship to be patient. Interference is useless there.”

“Am I not to interfere, sir, in my own house?”

“Unless I am entirely mistaken, madam, the end of the proceedings in your house is at hand. You will damage your own interests by interfering. Let us know what we are about at last. Let the end come.”

Lady Lundie yielded, and returned to her place. They all waited in silence for the opening of the doors.

Sir Patrick Lundie and Anne Silvester were alone in the room.

He took from the breast-pocket of his coat the sheet of note-paper which contained Anne’s let-

ter, and Geoffrey's reply. His hand trembled as he held it; his voice faltered as he spoke.

"I have done all that can be done," he said. "I have left nothing untried, to prevent the necessity of producing this."

"I feel your kindness gratefully, Sir Patrick. You must produce it now."

The woman's calmness presented a strange and touching contrast to the man's emotion. There was no shrinking in her face, there was no unsteadiness in her voice as she answered him. He took her hand. Twice he attempted to speak; and twice his own agitation overpowered him. He offered the letter to her in silence.

In silence on her side, she put the letter away from her, wondering what he meant.

"Take it back," he said. "I can't produce it! I daren't produce it. After what my own eyes have seen, after what my own ears have heard, in the next room—as God is my witness, I daren't ask you to declare yourself Geoffrey Delamayn's wife!"

She answered him in one word.

"Blanche!"

He shook his head impatiently. "Not even in Blanche's interests! Not even for Blanche's sake! If there is any risk, it is a risk I am ready to run. I hold to my own opinion. I believe my own view to be right. Let it come to an appeal to the law! I will fight the case, and win it."

"Are you *sure* of winning it, Sir Patrick?"

Instead of replying, he pressed the letter on

her. "Destroy it," he whispered. "And rely on my silence."

She took the letter from him.

"Destroy it," he repeated. "They may open the doors. They may come in at any moment, and see it in your hand."

"I have something to ask you, Sir Patrick, before I destroy it. Blanche refuses to go back to her husband, unless she returns with the certain assurance of being really his wife. If I produce this letter, she may go back to him to-day. If I declare myself Geoffrey Delamayn's wife, I clear Arnold Brinkworth, at once and forever, of all suspicion of being married to me. Can you as certainly and effectually clear him in any other way? Answer me that, as a man of honor speaking to a woman who implicitly trusts him!"

She looked him full in the face. His eyes dropped before hers—he made no reply.

"I am answered," she said.

With those words, she passed him, and laid her hand on the door.

He checked her. The tears rose in his eyes as he drew her gently back into the room.

"Why should we wait?" she asked.

"Wait," he answered, "as a favor to *me*."

She seated herself calmly in the nearest chair, and rested her head on her hand, thinking.

He bent over her, and roused her, impatiently, almost angrily. The steady resolution in her face was terrible to him, when he thought of the man in the next room.

"Take time to consider," he pleaded. "Don't

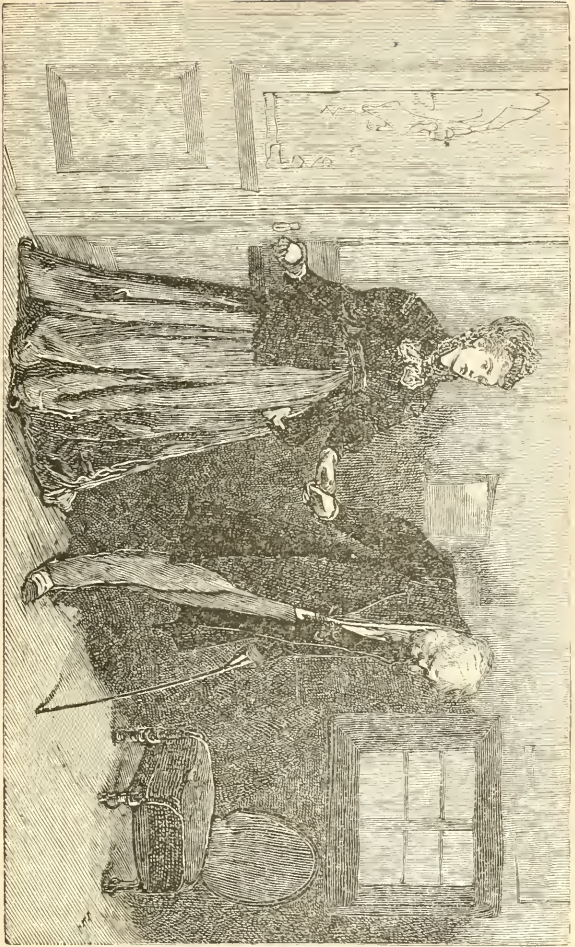
be led away by your own impulse. Don't act under a false excitement. Nothing binds you to this dreadful sacrifice of yourself."

"Excitement! Sacrifice!" She smiled sadly as she repeated the words. "Do you know, Sir Patrick, what I was thinking of a moment since? Only of old times, when I was a little girl. I saw the sad side of life sooner than most children see it. My mother was cruelly deserted. The hard marriage laws of this country were harder on her than on me. She died broken-hearted. But one friend comforted her at the last moment, and promised to be a mother to her child. I can't remember one unhappy day in all the after-time when I lived with that faithful woman and her little daughter—till the day that parted us. She went away with her husband; and I and the little daughter were left behind. She said her last words to me. Her heart was sinking under the dread of coming death. 'I promised your mother that you should be like my own child to me, and it quieted her mind. Quiet *my* mind, Anne, before I go. Whatever happens in years to come—promise me to be always what you are now, a sister to Blanche.' Where is the false excitement, Sir Patrick, in old remembrances like these? And how can there be a sacrifice in anything that I do for Blanche?"

She rose, and offered him her hand. Sir Patrick lifted it to his lips in silence.

"Come!" she said. "For both our sakes, let us not prolong this."

He turned aside his head. It was no mo-



SHE WAITED FOR HIM, WITH HER HAND ON THE LOCK.

—Man and Wife, Vol. Four, page 183.

ment to let her see that she had completely unmanned him. She waited for him, with her hand on the lock. He rallied his courage—he forced himself to face the horror of the situation calmly. She opened the door, and led the way back into the other room.

Not a word was spoken by any of the persons present, as the two returned to their places. The noise of a carriage passing in the street was painfully audible. The chance banging of a door in the lower regions of the house made every one start.

Anne's sweet voice broke the dreary silence.

"Must I speak for myself, Sir Patrick? Or will you (I ask it as a last and greatest favor) speak for me?"

"You insist on appealing to the letter in your hand?"

"I am resolved to appeal to it."

"Will nothing induce you to defer the close of this inquiry—so far as you are concerned—for four-and-twenty hours?"

"Either you or I, Sir Patrick, must say what is to be said, and do what is to be done, before we leave this room."

"Give me the letter."

She gave it to him. Mr. Moy whispered to his client, "Do you know what that is?" Geoffrey shook his head. "Do you really remember nothing about it?" Geoffrey answered in one surly word, "Nothing!"

Sir Patrick addressed himself to the assembled company.

“I have to ask your pardon,” he said, “for abruptly leaving the room, and for obliging Miss Silvester to leave it with me. Everybody present, except that man” (he pointed to Geoffrey), “will, I believe, understand and forgive me, now that I am forced to make my conduct the subject of the plainest and the fullest explanation. I shall address that explanation, for reasons which will presently appear, to my niece.”

Blanche started. “To me!” she exclaimed.

“To you,” Sir Patrick answered.

Blanche turned toward Arnold, daunted by a vague sense of something serious to come. The letter that she had received from her husband on her departure from Ham Farm had necessarily alluded to relations between Geoffrey and Anne, of which Blanche had been previously ignorant. Was any reference coming to those relations? Was there something yet to be disclosed which Arnold’s letter had not prepared her to hear?

Sir Patrick resumed.

“A short time since,” he said to Blanche, “I proposed to you to return to your husband’s protection, and to leave the termination of this matter in my hands. You have refused to go back to him until you are first certainly assured that you are his wife. Thanks to a sacrifice to your interests and your happiness, on Miss Silvester’s part—which I tell you frankly I have done my utmost to prevent—I am in a position to prove positively that Arnold Brinkworth was a single

man when he married you from my house in Kent.”

Mr. Moy's experience forewarned him of what was coming. He pointed to the letter in Sir Patrick's hand.

“Do you claim on a promise of marriage?” he asked.

Sir Patrick rejoined by putting a question on his side.

“Do you remember the famous decision at Doctors' Commons, which established the marriage of Captain Dalrymple and Miss Gordon?”

Mr. Moy was answered. “I understand you, Sir Patrick,” he said. After a moment's pause, he addressed his next words to Anne. “And, from the bottom of my heart, madam, I respect *you*.”

It was said with a fervent sincerity of tone which wrought the interest of the other persons, who were still waiting for enlightenment, to the highest pitch. Lady Lundie and Captain Newenden whispered to each other anxiously. Arnold turned pale. Blanche burst into tears.

Sir Patrick turned once more to his niece.

“Some little time since,” he said, “I had occasion to speak to you of the scandalous uncertainty of the marriage laws of Scotland. But for that uncertainty (entirely without parallel in any other civilized country in Europe), Arnold Brinkworth would never have occupied the position in which he stands here to-day—and these proceedings would never have taken place. Bear that fact in mind. It is not only answerable for

the mischief that has been already done, but for the far more serious evil which is still to come.”

Mr. Moy took a note. Sir Patrick went on.

“Loose and reckless as the Scotch law is, there happens, however, to be one case in which the action of it has been confirmed and settled by the English Courts. A written promise of marriage exchanged between a man and woman, in Scotland, marries that man and woman by Scotch law. An English Court of Justice (sitting in judgment on the case I have just mentioned to Mr. Moy) has pronounced that law to be good—and the decision has since been confirmed by the supreme authority of the House of Lords. Where the persons therefore—living in Scotland at the time—have promised each other marriage in writing, there is now no longer any doubt. They are certainly, and lawfully, Man and Wife.” He turned from his niece, and appealed to Mr. Moy. “Am I right?”

“Quite right, Sir Patrick, as to the facts. I own, however, that your commentary on them surprises me. I have the highest opinion of our Scottish marriage law. A man who has betrayed a woman under a promise of marriage is forced by that law (in the interests of public morality) to acknowledge her as his wife.”

“The persons here present, Mr. Moy, are now about to see the moral merit of the Scotch law of marriage (as approved by England) practically in operation before their own eyes. They will judge for themselves of the morality (Scotch or English) which first forces a deserted woman

back on the villain who has betrayed her, and then virtuously leaves her to bear the consequences."

With that answer, he turned to Anne, and showed her the letter, open in his hand.

"For the last time," he said, "do you insist on my appealing to this?"

She rose, and bowed her head gravely.

"It is my distressing duty," said Sir Patrick, "to declare, in this lady's name, and on the faith of written promises of marriage exchanged between the parties, then residing in Scotland, that she claims to be now—and to have been on the afternoon of the fourteenth of August last—Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn's wedded wife."

A cry of horror from Blanche, a low murmur of dismay from the rest, followed the utterance of those words.

There was a pause of an instant.

Then Geoffrey rose slowly to his feet, and fixed his eyes on the wife who had claimed him.

The spectators of the terrible scene turned with one accord toward the sacrificed woman. The look which Geoffrey had cast on her—the words which Geoffrey had spoken to her—were present to all their minds. She stood, waiting by Sir Patrick's side—her soft gray eyes resting sadly and tenderly on Blanche's face. To see that matchless courage and resignation was to doubt the reality of what had happened. They were forced to look back at the man to possess their minds with the truth.

The triumph of law and morality over him

was complete. He never uttered a word. His furious temper was perfectly and fearfully calm. With the promise of merciless vengeance written in the Devil's writing on his Devil-possessed face, he kept his eyes fixed on the hated woman whom he had ruined—on the hated woman who was fastened to him as his wife.

His lawyer went over to the table at which Sir Patrick sat. Sir Patrick handed him the sheet of note-paper.

He read the two letters contained in it with absorbed and deliberate attention. The moments that passed before he lifted his head from his reading seemed like hours. "Can you prove the handwritings?" he asked; "and prove the residence?"

Sir Patrick took up a second morsel of paper lying ready under his hand.

"There are the names of persons who can prove the writing, and prove the residence," he replied. "One of your two witnesses below stairs (otherwise useless) can speak to the hour at which Mr. Brinkworth arrived at the inn, and so can prove that the lady for whom he asked was, at that moment, Mrs. Geoffrey Delamayn. The indorsement on the back of the note-paper, also referring to the question of time, is in the handwriting of the same witness—to whom I refer you when it suits your convenience to question him."

"I will verify the references, Sir Patrick, as a matter of form. In the meantime, not to interpose needless and vexatious delay, I am bound

to say that I cannot resist the evidence of the marriage."

Having replied in those terms, he addressed himself, with marked respect and sympathy, to Anne.

"On the faith of the written promise of marriage exchanged between you in Scotland," he said, "you claim Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn as your husband?"

She steadily repeated the words after him.

"I claim Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn as my husband."

Mr. Moy appealed to his client. Geoffrey broke silence at last.

"Is it settled?" he asked.

"To all practical purposes, it is settled."

He went on, still looking at nobody but Anne.

"Has the law of Scotland made her my wife?"

"The law of Scotland has made her your wife."

He asked a third and last question.

"Does the law tell her to go where her husband goes?"

"Yes."

He laughed softly to himself, and beckoned to her to cross the room to the place at which he was standing.

She obeyed. At the moment when she took the first step to approach him, Sir Patrick caught her hand, and whispered to her, "Rely on me!" She gently pressed his hand in token that she understood him, and advanced to Geoffrey. At

the same moment, Blanche rushed between them, and flung her arms around Anne's neck.

"Oh, Anne! Anne!"

An hysterical passion of tears choked her utterance. Anne gently unwound the arms that clung round her—gently lifted the head that lay helpless on her bosom.

"Happier days are coming, my love," she said. "Don't think of *me*."

She kissed her—looked at her—kissed her again—and placed her in her husband's arms. Arnold remembered her parting words at Craig Fernie, when they had wished each other good-night. "You have not befriended an ungrateful woman. The day may yet come when I shall prove it." Gratitude and admiration struggled in him which should utter itself first, and held him speechless.

She bent her head gently in token that she understood him. Then she went on, and stood before Geoffrey.

"I am here," she said to him. "What do you wish me to do?"

A hideous smile parted his heavy lips. He offered her his arm.

"Mrs. Geoffrey Delamayn," he said. "Come home."

The picture of the lonely house, isolated amid its high walls; the ill-omened figure of the dumb woman with the stony eyes and the savage ways—the whole scene, as Anne had pictured it to him but two days since, rose vivid as reality before Sir Patrick's mind. "No," he cried out,

carried away by the generous impulse of the moment. "It shall *not* be!"

Geoffrey stood impenetrable—waiting with his offered arm. Pale and resolute, she lifted her noble head—called back the courage which had faltered for a moment—and took his arm.

He led her to the door. "Don't let Blanche fret about me," she said, simply, to Arnold as they went by. They passed Sir Patrick next. Once more his sympathy for her set every other consideration at defiance. He started up to bar the way to Geoffrey. Geoffrey paused, and looked at Sir Patrick for the first time.

"The law tells her to go with her husband," he said. "The law forbids you to part Man and Wife."

True. Absolutely, undeniably true. The law sanctioned the sacrifice of her as unanswerably as it had sanctioned the sacrifice of her mother before her. In the name of Morality, let him take her! In the interests of Virtue, let her get out of it if she can!

Her husband opened the door. Mr. Moy laid his hand on Sir Patrick's arm. Lady Lundie, Captain Newenden, the London lawyer, all left their places; influenced, for once, by the same interest; feeling, for once, the same suspense. Arnold followed them, supporting his wife. For one memorable instant Anne looked back at them all. Then she and her husband crossed the threshold. They descended the stairs together. The opening and closing of the house door was heard. They were gone.

Done, in the name of Morality. Done, in the interests of Virtue. Done, in an age of progress, and under the most perfect government on the face of the earth.

FIFTEENTH SCENE.—HOLCHESTER HOUSE.

CHAPTER THE FORTY-SEVENTH.

THE LAST CHANCE.

“His lordship is dangerously ill, sir. Her ladyship can receive no visitors.”

“Be so good as to take that card to Lady Holchester. It is absolutely necessary that your mistress should be made acquainted—in the interests of her younger son—with something which I can only mention to her ladyship herself.”

The two persons speaking were Lord Holchester’s head servant and Sir Patrick Lundie. At that time barely half an hour had passed since the close of the proceedings at Portland Place.

The servant still hesitated with the card in his hand. “I shall forfeit my situation,” he said, “if I do it.”

“You will most assuredly forfeit your situation if you *don’t* do it,” returned Sir Patrick.

“I warn you plainly, this is too serious a matter to be trifled with.”

The tone in which those words were spoken had its effect. The man went upstairs with his message.

Sir Patrick waited in the hall. Even the momentary delay of entering one of the reception-rooms was more than he could endure at that moment. Anne's happiness was hopelessly sacrificed already. The preservation of her personal safety—which Sir Patrick firmly believed to be in danger—was the one service which it was possible to render to her now. The perilous position in which she stood toward her husband—as an immovable obstacle, while she lived, between Geoffrey and Mrs. Glenarm—was beyond the reach of remedy. But it was still possible to prevent her from becoming the innocent cause of Geoffrey's pecuniary ruin, by standing in the way of a reconciliation between father and son. Resolute to leave no means untried of serving Anne's interests, Sir Patrick had allowed Arnold and Blanche to go to his own residence in London, alone, and had not even waited to say a farewell word to any of the persons who had taken part in the inquiry. “Her life may depend on what I can do for her at Holchester House!” With that conviction in him, he had left Portland Place. With that conviction in him, he had sent his message to Lady Holchester, and was now waiting for the reply.

The servant appeared again on the stairs. Sir Patrick went up to meet him.

“Her ladyship will see you, sir, for a few minutes.”

The door of an upper room was opened; and Sir Patrick found himself in the presence of Geoffrey’s mother. There was only time to observe that she possessed the remains of rare personal beauty, and that she received her visitor with a grace and courtesy which implied (under the circumstances) a considerate regard for *his* position at the expense of her own.

“You have something to say to me, Sir Patrick, on the subject of my second son. I am in great affliction. If you bring me bad news, I will do my best to bear it. May I trust to your kindness not to keep me in suspense?”

“It will help me to make my intrusion as little painful as possible to your ladyship,” replied Sir Patrick, “if I am permitted to ask a question. Have you heard of any obstacle to the contemplated marriage of Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn and Mrs. Glenarm?”

Even that distant reference to Anne produced an ominous change for the worse in Lady Holchester’s manner.

“I have heard of the obstacle to which you allude,” she said. “Mrs. Glenarm is an intimate friend of mine. She has informed me that a person named Silvester, an impudent adventurer—”

“I beg your ladyship’s pardon. You are doing a cruel wrong to the noblest woman I have ever met with.”

“I cannot undertake, Sir Patrick, to enter into

your reasons for admiring her. Her conduct toward my son has, I repeat, been the conduct of an impudent adventuress."

Those words showed Sir Patrick the utter hopelessness of shaking her prejudice against Anne. He decided on proceeding at once to the disclosure of the truth.

"I entreat you to say no more," he answered. "Your ladyship is speaking of your son's wife."

"My son has married Miss Silvester?"

"Yes."

She turned deadly pale. It appeared, for an instant, as if the shock had completely overwhelmed her. But the mother's weakness was only momentary. The virtuous indignation of the great lady had taken its place before Sir Patrick could speak again. She rose to terminate the interview.

"I presume," she said, "that your errand here is at an end."

Sir Patrick rose, on his side, resolute to do the duty which had brought him to the house.

"I am compelled to trespass on your ladyship's attention for a few minutes more," he answered. "The circumstances attending the marriage of Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn are of no common importance. I beg permission (in the interests of his family) to state, very briefly, what they are."

In a few clear sentences he narrated what had happened, that afternoon, in Portland Place. Lady Holchester listened with the steadiest and coldest attention. So far as outward appear-

ances were concerned, no impression was produced upon her.

“Do you expect me,” she asked, “to espouse the interests of a person who has prevented my son from marrying the lady of his choice, and of mine?”

“Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn, unhappily, has that reason for resenting his wife’s innocent interference with interests of considerable importance to him,” returned Sir Patrick. “I request your ladyship to consider whether it is desirable—in view of your son’s conduct in the future—to allow his wife to stand in the doubly perilous relation toward him of being also a cause of estrangement between his father and himself.”

He had put it with scrupulous caution. But Lady Holchester understood what he had refrained from saying as well as what he had actually said. She had hitherto remained standing—she now sat down again. There was a visible impression produced on her at last.

“In Lord Holchester’s critical state of health,” she answered, “I decline to take the responsibility of telling him what you have just told me. My own influence has been uniformly exerted in my son’s favor—as long as my interference could be productive of any good result. The time for my interference has passed. Lord Holchester has altered his will this morning. I was not present; and I have not yet been informed of what has been done. Even if I knew—”

“Your ladyship would naturally decline,” said

Sir Patrick, "to communicate the information to a stranger."

"Certainly. At the same time, after what you have said, I do not feel justified in deciding on this matter entirely by myself. One of Lord Holchester's executors is now in the house. There can be no impropriety in your seeing him—if you wish it. You are at liberty to say, from me, that I leave it entirely to his discretion to decide what ought to be done."

"I gladly accept your ladyship's proposal."

Lady Holchester rang the bell at her side.

"Take Sir Patrick Lundie to Mr. Marchwood," she said to the servant.

Sir Patrick started. The name was familiar to him, as the name of a friend.

"Mr. Marchwood of Hurlbeck?" he asked.

"The same."

With that brief answer, Lady Holchester dismissed her visitor. Following the servant to the other end of the corridor, Sir Patrick was conducted into a small room—the antechamber to the bedroom in which Lord Holchester lay. The door of communication was closed. A gentleman sat writing at a table near the window. He rose, and held out his hand, with a look of surprise, when the servant announced Sir Patrick's name. This was Mr. Marchwood.

After the first explanations had been given, Sir Patrick patiently reverted to the object of his visit to Holchester House. On the first occasion when he mentioned Anne's name he observed that Mr. Marchwood became, from

that moment, specially interested in what he was saying.

“Do you happen to be acquainted with the lady?” he asked.

“I only know her as the cause of a very strange proceeding, this morning, in that room.” He pointed to Lord Holchester’s bedroom as he spoke.

“Are you at liberty to mention what the proceeding was?”

“Hardly—even to an old friend like you—unless I felt it a matter of duty, on my part, to state the circumstances. Pray go on with what you were saying to me. You were on the point of telling me what brought you to this house.”

Without a word more of preface, Sir Patrick told him the news of Geoffrey’s marriage to Anne.

“Married!” cried Mr. Marchwood. “Are you sure of what you say?”

“I am one of the witnesses of the marriage.”

“Good heavens! And Lord Holchester’s lawyer has left the house!”

“Can I replace him? Have I, by any chance, justified you in telling me what happened this morning in the next room?”

“Justified me? You have left me no other alternative. The doctors are all agreed in dreading apoplexy—his lordship may die at any moment. In the lawyer’s absence, I must take it on myself. Here are the facts. There is the codicil to Lord Holchester’s Will, which is still unsigned.”

“Relating to his second son?”

“Relating to Geoffrey Delamayn, and giving him (when it is once executed) a liberal provision for life.”

“What is the object in the way of his executing it?”

“The lady whom you have just mentioned to me.”

“Anne Silvester?”

“Anne Silvester—now (as you tell me) Mrs. Geoffrey Delamayn. I can only explain the thing very imperfectly. There are certain painful circumstances associated in his lordship’s memory with this lady, or with some member of her family. We can only gather that he did something—in the early part of his professional career—which was strictly within the limits of his duty, but which apparently led to very sad results. Some days since he unfortunately heard (either through Mrs. Glenarm or through Mrs. Julius Delamayn) of Miss Silvester’s appearance at Swanhaven Lodge. No remark on the subject escaped him at the time: It was only this morning, when the codicil giving the legacy to Geoffrey was waiting to be executed, that his real feeling in the matter came out. To our astonishment, he refused to sign it. ‘Find Anne Silvester’ (was the only answer we could get from him); ‘and bring her to my bedside. You all say my son is guiltless of injuring her. I am lying on my death-bed. I have serious reasons of my own—I owe it to the memory of the dead—to assure myself of the truth. If Anne Silves-

ter herself acquits him of having wronged her, I will provide for Geoffrey. Not otherwise.' We went the length of reminding him that he might die before Miss Silvester could be found. Our interference had but one result. He desired the lawyer to add a second codicil to the Will—which he executed on the spot. It directs his executors to inquire into the relations that have actually existed between Anne Silvester and his younger son. If we find reason to conclude that Geoffrey has gravely wronged her, we are directed to pay her a legacy—provided that she is a single woman at the time."

"And her marriage violates the provision!" exclaimed Sir Patrick.

"Yes. The codicil actually executed is now worthless. And the other codicil remains unsigned until the lawyer can produce Miss Silvester. He has left the house to apply to Geoffrey at Fulham, as the only means at our disposal of finding the lady. Some hours have passed—and he has not yet returned."

"It is useless to wait for him," said Sir Patrick. "While the lawyer was on his way to Fulham, Lord Holchester's son was on his way to Portland Place. This is even more serious than you suppose. Tell me, what under less pressing circumstances I should have no right to ask. Apart from the unexecuted codicil, what is Geoffrey Delamayn's position in the will?"

"He is not even mentioned in it."

"Have you got the will?"

Mr. Marchwood unlocked the drawer, and took it out.

Sir Patrick instantly rose from his chair.

“No waiting for the lawyer!” he repeated vehemently. “This is a matter of life and death. Lady Holchester bitterly resents her son’s marriage. She speaks and feels as a friend of Mrs. Glenarm. Do you think Lord Holchester would take the same view, if he knew of it?”

“It depends entirely on the circumstances.”

“Suppose I informed him—as I inform you in confidence—that his son *has* gravely wronged Miss Silvester? And suppose I followed that up by telling him that his son has made atonement by marrying her?”

“After the feeling that he has shown in the matter, I believe he would sign the codicil.”

“Then, for God’s sake, let me see him!”

“I must speak to the doctor.”

“Do it instantly!”

With the will in his hand, Mr. Marchwood advanced to the bedroom door. It was opened from within before he could get to it. The doctor appeared on the threshold. He held up his hand warningly when Mr. Marchwood attempted to speak to him.

“Go to Lady Holchester,” he said. “It’s all over.”

“Dead?”

“Dead.”

SIXTEENTH SCENE.—SALT PATCH.

CHAPTER THE FORTY-EIGHTH.

THE PLACE.

EARLY in the present century it was generally reported among the neighbors of one Reuben Limbrick that he was in a fair way to make a comfortable little fortune by dealing in salt.

His place of abode was in Staffordshire, on a morsel of freehold land of his own—appropriately called Salt Patch. Without being absolutely a miser, he lived in the humblest manner, saw very little company; skillfully invested his money; and persisted in remaining a single man.

Toward eighteen hundred and forty he first felt the approach of the chronic malady which ultimately terminated his life. After trying what the medical men of his own locality could do for him, with very poor success, he met by accident with a doctor living in the western suburbs of London, who thoroughly understood his complaint. After some journeying backward and forward to consult this gentleman, he decided on retiring from business and on taking up his abode within an easy distance of his medical man.

Finding a piece of freehold land to be sold in the neighborhood of Fulham, he bought it, and

had a cottage residence built on it, under his own directions. He surrounded the whole—being a man singularly jealous of any intrusion on his retirement, or of any chance observation of his ways and habits—with a high wall, which cost a large sum of money and which was rightly considered a dismal and hideous object by the neighbors. When the new residence was completed, he called it after the name of the place in Staffordshire where he had made his money and where he had lived during the happiest period of his life. His relatives, failing to understand that a question of sentiment was involved in this proceeding, appealed to hard facts, and reminded him that there were no salt-mines in the neighborhood. Reuben Limbrick answered, “So much the worse for the neighborhood”—and persisted in calling his property “Salt Patch.”

The cottage was so small that it looked quite lost in the large garden all round it. There was a ground-floor and a floor above it—and that was all.

On either side of the passage, on the lower floor, were two rooms. At the right-hand side, on entering by the front door, there was a kitchen, with its outhouses attached. The room next to the kitchen looked into the garden. In Reuben Limbrick’s time it was called a study, and contained a small collection of books and a large store of fishing-tackle. On the left-hand side of the passage there was a drawing-room situated at the back of the house, and communicating with a dining-room in the front. On the

upper floor there were five bedrooms—two on one side of the passage, corresponding in size with the dining-room and the drawing-room below, but not opening into each other; three on the other side of the passage, consisting of one larger room in front, and of two small rooms at the back. All these were solidly and completely furnished. Money had not been spared, and workmanship had not been stinted. It was all substantial—and, upstairs and downstairs, it was all ugly.

The situation of Salt Patch was lonely. The lands of the market-gardeners separated it from other houses. Jealously surrounded by its own high walls, the cottage suggested, even to the most unimaginative persons, the idea of an asylum or a prison. Reuben Limbrick's relatives, occasionally coming to stay with him, found the place prey on their spirits, and rejoiced when the time came for going home again. They were never pressed to stay against their will. Reuben Limbrick was not a hospitable or a sociable man. He set very little value on human sympathy, in his attacks of illness; and he bore congratulations impatiently, in his intervals of health. "I care about nothing but fishing," he used to say. "I find my dog very good company. And I am quite happy as long as I am free from pain."

On his death-bed he divided his money justly enough among his relations. The only part of his Will which exposed itself to unfavorable criticism, was a clause conferring a legacy on one

of his sisters (then a widow) who had estranged herself from her family by marrying beneath her. The family agreed in considering this unhappy person as underserving of notice or benefit. Her name was Hester Dethridge. It proved to be a great aggravation of Hester's offenses, in the eyes of Hester's relatives, when it was discovered that she possessed a life interest in Salt Patch, and an income of two hundred a year.

Not visited by the surviving members of her family, living, literally, by herself in the world, Hester decided, in spite of her comfortable little income, on letting lodgings. The explanation of this strange conduct which she had written on her slate, in reply to an inquiry from Anne, was the true one. "I have not got a friend in the world: I dare not live alone." In that desolate situation, and with that melancholy motive, she put the house into an agent's hands. The first person in want of lodgings whom the agent sent to see the place was Perry the trainer; and Hester's first tenant was Geoffrey Delamayn.

The rooms which the landlady reserved for herself were the kitchen, the room next to it, which had once been her brother's "study," and the two small back bedrooms upstairs—one for herself, the other for the servant-girl whom she employed to help her. The whole of the rest of the cottage was to let. It was more than the trainer wanted; but Hester Dethridge refused to dispose of her lodgings—either as to the rooms occupied, or as to the period for which they were

to be taken—on other than her own terms. Perry had no alternative but to lose the advantage of the garden as a private training-ground, or to submit.

Being only two in number, the lodgers had three bedrooms to choose from. Geoffrey established himself in the back room, over the drawing-room. Perry chose the front room, placed on the other side of the cottage, next to the two smaller apartments occupied by Hester and her maid. Under this arrangement, the front bedroom, on the opposite side of the passage—next to the room in which Geoffrey slept—was left empty, and was called, for the time being, the spare room. As for the lower floor, the athlete and his trainer ate their meals in the dining-room; and left the drawing-room, as a needless luxury, to take care of itself.

The Foot-race once over, Perry's business at the cottage was at an end. His empty bedroom became a second spare room. The term for which the lodgings had been taken was then still unexpired. On the day after the race Geoffrey had to choose between sacrificing the money, or remaining in the lodgings by himself, with two spare bedrooms on his hands, and with a drawing-room for the reception of his visitors—who called with pipes in their mouths, and whose idea of hospitality was a pot of beer in the garden.

To use his own phrase, he was "out of sorts." A sluggish reluctance to face change of any kind possessed him. He decided on staying at Salt

Patch until his marriage to Mrs. Glenarn (which he then looked upon as a certainty) obliged him to alter his habits completely, once for all. From Fulham he had gone, the next day, to attend the inquiry in Portland Place. And to Fulham he returned, when he brought the wife who had been forced upon him to her "home."

Such was the position of the tenant, and such were the arrangements of the interior of the cottage, on the memorable evening when Anne Silvester entered it as Geoffrey's wife.

CHAPTER THE FORTY-NINTH.

THE NIGHT.

ON leaving Lady Lundie's house, Geoffrey called the first empty cab that passed him. He opened the door, and signed to Anne to enter the vehicle. She obeyed him mechanically. He placed himself on the seat opposite to her, and told the man to drive to Fulham.

The cab started on its journey, husband and wife preserving absolute silence. Anne laid her head back wearily, and closed her eyes. Her strength had broken down under the effort which had sustained her from the beginning to the end of the inquiry. Her power of thinking was gone. She felt nothing, knew nothing, feared nothing. Half in faintness, half in slum-

ber, she had lost all sense of her own terrible position before the first five minutes of the journey to Fulham had come to an end.

Sitting opposite to her, savagely self-concentrated in his own thoughts, Geoffrey roused himself on a sudden. An idea had sprung to life in his sluggish brain. He put his head out of the window of the cab, and directed the driver to turn back and go to a hotel near the Great Northern Railway.

Resuming his seat, he looked furtively at Anne. She neither moved nor opened her eyes—she was, to all appearance, unconscious of what had happened. He observed her attentively. Was she really ill? Was the time coming when he would be freed from her? He pondered over that question, watching her closely. Little by little the vile hope slowly in him died away, and a vile suspicion took its place. What if this appearance of illness was a pretense? What if she was waiting to throw him off his guard, and escape from him at the first opportunity? He put his head out of the window again, and gave another order to the driver. The cab diverged from the direct route, and stopped at a public-house in Holborn, kept (under an assumed name) by Perry the trainer.

Geoffrey wrote a line in pencil on his card, and sent it into the house by the driver. After waiting some minutes, a lad appeared and touched his hat. Geoffrey spoke to him out of the window in an undertone. The lad took his place on the box by the driver. The cab turned

back, and took the road to the hotel near the Great Northern Railway.

Arrived at the place, Geoffrey posted the lad close at the door of the cab, and pointed to Anne, still reclining with closed eyes; still, as it seemed, too weary to lift her head, too faint to notice anything that happened. "If she attempts to get out, stop her and send for me." With those parting directions he entered the hotel and asked for Mr. Moy.

Mr. Moy was in the house; he had just returned from Portland Place. He rose, and bowed coldly, when Geoffrey was shown into his sitting-room.

"What is your business with me?" he asked.

"I've had a notion come into my head," said Geoffrey, "and I want to speak to you about it directly."

"I must request you to consult some one else. Consider me, if you please, as having withdrawn from all further connection with your affairs."

Geoffrey looked at him in stolid surprise.

"Do you mean to say you're going to leave me in the lurch?" he asked.

"I mean to say that I will take no fresh step in any business of yours," answered Mr. Moy, firmly. "As to the future, I have ceased to be your legal adviser. As to the past, I shall carefully complete the formal duties toward you which remain to be done. Mrs. Inchbare and Bishopriggs are coming here, by appointment, at six this evening, to receive the money due to them before they go back. I shall return to

Scotland myself by the night mail. The persons referred to in the matter of the promise of marriage, by Sir Patrick, are all in Scotland. I will take their evidence as to the handwriting, and as to the question of residence in the North—and I will send it to you in written form. That done, I shall have done all. I decline to advise you in any future step which you propose to take.”

After reflecting for a moment, Geoffrey put a last question.

“You said Bishopriggs and the woman would be here at six this evening.”

“Yes.”

“Where are they to be found before that?”

Mr. Moy wrote a few words on a slip of paper, and handed it to Geoffrey. “At their lodgings,” he said. “There is the address.”

Geoffrey took the address, and left the room. Lawyer and client parted without a word on either side.

Returning to the cab, Geoffrey found the lad steadily waiting at his post.

“Has anything happened?”

“The lady hasn’t moved, sir, since you left her.”

“Is Perry at the public-house?”

“Not at this time, sir.”

“I want a lawyer. Do you know who Perry’s lawyer is?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And where he is to be found?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Get upon the box, and tell the man where to drive to.”

The cab went on again along the Euston Road, and stopped at a house in a side street, with a professional brass plate on the door. The lad got down and came to the window.

“Here it is, sir.”

“Knock at the door, and see if he is at home.”

He proved to be at home. Geoffrey entered the house, leaving his emissary once more on the watch. The lad noticed that the lady moved this time. She shivered as if she felt cold—opened her eyes for a moment wearily, and looked out through the window—sighed, and sank back again in the corner of the cab.

After an absence of more than half an hour Geoffrey came out again. His interview with Perry’s lawyer appeared to have relieved his mind of something that had oppressed it. He once more ordered the driver to go to Fulham—opened the door to get into the cab—then, as it seemed, suddenly recollected himself—and, calling the lad down from the box, ordered him to get inside, and took his place by the driver.

As the cab started, he looked over his shoulder at Anne through the front window. “Well worth trying,” he said to himself. “It’s the way to be even with her. And it’s the way to be free.”

They arrived at the cottage. Possibly, repose had restored Anne’s strength. Possibly, the sight of the place had roused the instinct of self-preservation in her at last. To Geoffrey’s sur-

prise, she left the cab without assistance. When he opened the wooden gate, with his own key, she recoiled from it, and looked at him for the first time.

He pointed to the entrance.

“Go in,” he said.

“On what terms?” she asked, without stirring a step.

Geoffrey dismissed the cab, and sent the lad in to wait for further orders. These things done, he answered her loudly and brutally, the moment they were alone:

“On any terms I please.”

“Nothing will induce me,” she said, firmly, “to live with you as your wife. You may kill me—but you will never bend me to that.”

He advanced a step—opened his lips—and suddenly checked himself. He waited a while, turning something over in his mind. When he spoke again, it was with marked deliberation and constraint—with the air of a man who was repeating words put into his lips, or words prepared beforehand.

“I have something to tell you in the presence of witnesses,” he said. “I don’t ask you, or wish you, to see me in the cottage alone.”

She started at the change in him. His sudden composure, and his sudden nicety in the choice of words, tried her courage far more severely than it had been tried by his violence of the moment before.

He waited her decision, still pointing through the gate. She trembled a little—steadied herself

again—and went in. The lad, waiting in the front garden, followed her.

He threw open the drawing-room door, on the left-hand side of the passage. She entered the room. The servant-girl appeared. He said to her, "Fetch Mrs. Dethridge; and come back with her yourself." Then he went into the room; the lad, by his own directions, following him in; and the door being left wide open.

Hester Dethridge came out from the kitchen, with the girl behind her. At the sight of Anne, a faint and momentary change passed over the stony stillness of her face. A dull light glimmered in her eyes. She slowly nodded her head. A dumb sound, vaguely expressive of something like exultation or relief, escaped her lips.

Geoffrey spoke—once more, with marked deliberation and constraint; once more, with the air of repeating something which had been prepared beforehand. He pointed to Anne.

"This woman is my wife," he said. "In the presence of you three, as witnesses, I tell her that I don't forgive her. I have brought her here—having no other place in which I can trust her to be—to wait the issue of proceedings, undertaken in defense of my own honor and good name. While she stays here, she will live separate from me, in a room of her own. If it is necessary for me to communicate with her, I shall only see her in the presence of a third person. Do you all understand me?"

Hester Dethridge bowed her head. The other two answered, "Yes"—and turned to go out.

Anne rose. At a sign from Geoffrey, the servant and the lad waited in the room to hear what she had to say.

“I know nothing in my conduct,” she said, addressing herself to Geoffrey, “which justifies you in telling these people that you don’t forgive me. Those words applied by you to me are an insult. I am equally ignorant of what you mean when you speak of defending your good name. All I understand is, that we are separate persons in this house, and that I am to have a room of my own. I am grateful, whatever your motives may be, for the arrangement that you have proposed. Direct one of these two women to show me my room.”

Geoffrey turned to Hester Dethridge.

“Take her upstairs,” he said; “and let her pick which room she pleases. Give her what she wants to eat or drink. Bring down the address of the place where her luggage is. The lad here will go back by railway and fetch it. That’s all. Be off.”

Hester went out. Anne followed her up the stairs. In the passage on the upper floor she stopped. The dull light flickered again for a moment in her eyes. She wrote on her slate, and held it up to Anne, with these words on it: “I knew you would come back. It’s not over yet between you and him.” Anne made no reply. She went on writing, with something faintly like a smile on her thin, colorless lips. “I know something of bad husbands. Yours is as bad a one as ever stood in shoes. He’ll try you.”

Anne made an effort to stop her. "Don't you see how tired I am?" she said, gently. Hester Dethridge dropped the slate—looked with a steady and uncompassionate attention in Anne's face—nodded her head, as much as to say, "I see it now"—and led the way into one of the empty rooms.

It was the front bedroom over the drawing-room. The first glance round showed it to be scrupulously clean, and solidly and tastelessly furnished. The hideous paper on the walls, the hideous carpet on the floor, were both of the best quality. The great heavy mahogany bedstead, with its curtains hanging from a hook in the ceiling, and with its clumsily-carved head and foot on the same level, offered to view the anomalous spectacle of French design overwhelmed by English execution. The most noticeable thing in the room was the extraordinary attention which had been given to the defense of the door. Besides the usual lock and key, it possessed two solid bolts, fastening inside at the top and the bottom. It had been one among the many eccentric sides of Reuben Limbrick's character to live in perpetual dread of thieves breaking into his cottage at night. All the outer doors and all the window-shutters were solidly sheathed with iron, and had alarm-bells attached to them on a new principle. Every one of the bedrooms possessed its two bolts on the inner side of the door. And to crown all, on the roof of the cottage was a little belfry, containing a bell large enough to make itself heard at the Fulham police

station. In Reuben Limbrick's time the rope had communicated with his bedroom. It hung now against the wall, in the passage outside.

Looking from one to the other of the objects around her, Anne's eyes rested on the partition wall which divided the room from the room next to it. The wall was not broken by a door of communication; it had nothing placed against it but a washhand-stand and two chairs.

"Who sleeps in the next room?" said Anne.

Hester Dethridge pointed down to the drawing-room in which they had left Geoffrey. Geoffrey slept in the room.

Anne led the way out again into the passage.

"Show me the second room," she said.

The second room was also in front of the house. More ugliness (of first-rate quality) in the paper and the carpet. Another heavy mahogany bedstead; but, this time, a bedstead with a canopy attached to the head of it—supporting its own curtains. Anticipating Anne's inquiry, on this occasion, Hester looked toward the next room, at the back of the cottage, and pointed to herself. Anne at once decided on choosing the second room; it was the furthest from Geoffrey. Hester waited while she wrote the address at which her luggage would be found (at the house of the musical agent), and then, having applied for and received her directions as to the evening meal which she should send upstairs, quitted the room. Left alone, Anne secured the door, and threw herself on the bed. Still too weary to exert her mind, still physically incapable of realizing the

helplessness and the peril of her position, she opened a locket that hung from her neck, kissed the portrait of her mother and the portrait of Blanche placed opposite to each other inside it, and sank into a deep and dreamless sleep.

Meanwhile Geoffrey repeated his final orders to the lad at the cottage gate.

“When you have got the luggage, you are to go to the lawyer. If he can come here to-night, you will show him the way. If he can’t come, you will bring me a letter from him. Make any mistake in this, and it will be the worst day’s work you ever did in your life. Away with you, and don’t lose the train.”

The lad ran off. Geoffrey waited, looking after him, and turning over in his mind what had been done up to that time.

“All right so far,” he said to himself. “I didn’t ride in the cab with her. I told her before witnesses I didn’t forgive her, and why I had her in the house. I’ve put her in a room by herself. And if I *must* see her, I see her with Hester Dethridge for a witness. My part’s done—let the lawyer do his.”

He strolled round into the back-garden, and lighted his pipe. After a while, as the twilight faded, he saw a light in Hester’s sitting-room on the ground floor. He went to the window. Hester and the servant-girl were both there at work. “Well,” he asked, “how about the woman upstairs?” Hester’s slate, aided by the girl’s tongue, told him all about “the woman” that was to be told. They had taken up to her

room tea and an omelet; and they had been obliged to wake her from a sleep. She had eaten a little of the omelet, and had drunk eagerly of the tea. They had gone up again to take the tray down. She had returned to the bed—she was not asleep—only dull and heavy. Made no remark. Looked clean worn out. We left her a light; and we let her be. Such was the report. After listening to it, without making any mark, Geoffrey filled a second pipe and resumed his walk. The time wore on. It began to feel chilly in the garden. The rising wind swept audibly over the open lands round the cottage; the stars twinkled their last; nothing was to be seen overhead but the black void of night. More rain coming. Geoffrey went indoors.

An evening newspaper was on the dining-room table. The candles were lighted. He sat down, and tried to read. No! There was nothing in the newspaper that he cared about. The time for hearing from the lawyer was drawing nearer and nearer. Reading was of no use. Sitting still was of no use. He got up, and went out in the front of the cottage—strolled to the gate—opened it—and looked idly up and down the road.

But one living creature was visible by the light of the gas-lamp over the gate. The creature came nearer, and proved to be the postman going his last round, with the last delivery for the night. He came up to the gate with a letter in his hand.

“The Honorable Geoffrey Delamayn?”

“All right.”

He took the letter from the postman, and went back into the dining-room. Looking at the address by the light of the candles he recognized the handwriting of Mrs. Glenarm. “To congratulate me on my marriage!” he said to himself, bitterly, and opened the letter.

Mrs. Glenarm’s congratulations were expressed in these terms:

“MY ADORED GEOFFREY—I have heard all. My beloved one! my own! you are sacrificed to the vilest wretch that walks the earth, and I have lost you! How is it that I live after hearing it? How is it that I can think, and write, with my brain on fire, and my heart broken? Oh, my angel, there is a purpose that supports me—pure, beautiful, worthy of us both. I live, Geoffrey—I live to dedicate myself to the adored idea of You. My hero! my first, last love! I will marry no other man. I will live and die—I vow it solemnly on my bended knees—I will live and die true to You. I am your Spiritual Wife. My beloved Geoffrey! *she* can’t come between us, there—*she* can never rob you of my heart’s unalterable fidelity, of my soul’s unearthly devotion. I am your Spiritual Wife! Oh, the blameless luxury of writing those words! Write back to me, beloved one, and say you feel it too. Vow it, idol of my heart, as I have vowed it. Unalterable fidelity! unearthly devotion! Never, never will I be the wife of any other man! Never, never will I forgive the

woman who has come between us! Yours ever and only; yours with the stainless passion that burns on the altar of the heart; yours, yours, yours,
E. G."

This outbreak of hysterical nonsense—in itself simply ridiculous—assumed a serious importance in its effect on Geoffrey. It associated the direct attainment of his own interests with the gratification of his vengeance on Anne. Ten thousand a year self-dedicated to him—and nothing to prevent his putting out his hand and taking it but the woman who had caught him in her trap, the woman upstairs who had fastened herself on him for life!

He put the letter into his pocket. "Wait till I hear from the lawyer," he said to himself. "The easiest way out of it is *that* way. And it's the law."

He looked impatiently at his watch. As he put it back again in his pocket there was a ring at the bell. Was it the lad bringing the luggage? Yes. And, with it, the lawyer's report? No. Better than that—the lawyer himself.

"Come in!" cried Geoffrey, meeting his visitor at the door.

The lawyer entered the dining-room. The candle-light revealed to view a corpulent, full-lipped, bright-eyed man—with a stain of negro blood in his yellow face, and with unmistakable traces in his look and manner of walking habitually in the dirtiest professional by-ways of the law.

"I've got a little place of my own in your neighborhood," he said. "And I thought I would look in myself, Mr. Delamayn, on my way home."

"Have you seen the witnesses?"

"I have examined them both, sir. First, Mrs. Inchbare and Mr. Bishopriggs together. Next, Mrs. Inchbare and Mr. Bishopriggs separately."

"Well?"

"Well, sir, the result is unfavorable, I am sorry to say."

"What do you mean?"

"Neither the one nor the other of them, Mr. Delamayn, can give the evidence we want. I have made sure of that."

"Made sure of that? You have made an infernal mess of it! You don't understand the case!"

The mulatto lawyer smiled. The rudeness of his client appeared only to amuse him.

"Don't I?" he said. "Suppose you tell me where I am wrong about it? Here it is in outline only. On the fourteenth of August last your wife was at an inn in Scotland. A gentleman named Arnold Brinkworth joined her there. He represented himself to be her husband, and he stayed with her till the next morning. Starting from those facts, the object you have in view is to sue for a Divorce from your wife. You make Mr. Arnold Brinkworth the co-respondent. And you produce in evidence the waiter and the landlady of the inn. Anything wrong, sir, so far?"

Nothing wrong. At one cowardly stroke to

cast Anne disgraced on the world, and to set himself free—there, plainly and truly stated, was the scheme which he had devised when he had turned back on the way to Fulham to consult Mr. Moy.

“So much for the case,” resumed the lawyer. “Now for what I have done on receiving your instructions. I have examined the witnesses; and I have had an interview (not a very pleasant one) with Mr. Moy. The result of those two proceedings is briefly this. First discovery: In assuming the character of the lady’s husband, Mr. Brinkworth was acting under your directions—which tells dead against *you*. Second discovery: Not the slightest impropriety of conduct, not an approach even to harmless familiarity, was detected by either of the witnesses, while the lady and gentleman were together at the inn. There is literally no evidence to produce against them, except that they *were* together—in two rooms. How are you to assume a guilty purpose, when you can’t prove an approach to a guilty act? You can no more take such a case as that into Court than you can jump over the roof of this cottage.”

He looked hard at his client, expecting to receive a violent reply. His client agreeably disappointed him. A very strange impression appeared to have been produced on this reckless and headstrong man. He got up quietly; he spoke with perfect outward composure of face and manner when he said his next words.

“Have you given up the case?”

“As things are at present, Mr. Delamayn, there is no case.”

“And no hope of my getting divorced from her?”

“Wait a moment. Have your wife and Mr. Brinkworth met nowhere since they were together at the Scotch inn?”

“Nowhere.”

“As to the future, of course I can't say. As to the past, there is no hope of your getting divorced from her.”

“Thank you. Good-night.”

“Good-night, Mr. Delamayn.”

Fastened to her for life—and the law powerless to cut the knot.

He pondered over that result until he had thoroughly realized it and fixed it in his mind. Then he took out Mrs. Glenarm's letter, and read it through again attentively from beginning to end.

Nothing could shake her devotion to him. Nothing would induce her to marry another man. There she was—in her own words—dedicated to him; waiting, with her fortune at her own disposal, to be his wife. There also was his father, waiting (so far as *he* knew, in the absence of any tidings from Holchester House) to welcome Mrs. Glenarm as a daughter-in-law and to give Mrs. Glenarm's husband an income of his own.

As fair a prospect, on all sides, as man could desire. And nothing in the way of it but

the woman who had caught him in her trap—the woman upstairs who had fastened herself on him for life.

He went out in the garden in the darkness of the night.

There was open communication, on all sides, between the back garden and the front. He walked round and round the cottage—now appearing in a stream of light from a window; now disappearing again in the darkness. The wind blew refreshingly over his bare head. For some minutes he went round and round, faster and faster, without a pause. When he stopped at last, it was in front of the cottage. He lifted his head slowly, and looked up at the dim light in the window of Anne's room.

“How?” he said to himself. “That's the question. How?”

He went indoors again, and rang the bell. The servant-girl who answered it started back at the sight of him. His florid color was all gone. His eyes looked at her without appearing to see her. The perspiration was standing on his forehead in great heavy drops.

“Are you ill, sir?” said the girl.

He told her, with an oath, to hold her tongue and bring the brandy. When she entered the room for the second time, he was standing with his back to her, looking out at the night. He never moved when she put the bottle on the table. She heard him muttering as if he was talking to himself.

The same difficulty which had been present to

his mind in secret under Anne's window was present to his mind still.

How? That was the problem to solve. How?

He turned to the brandy, and took counsel of that.

CHAPTER THE FIFTIETH.

THE MORNING.

WHEN does the vain regret find its keenest sting? When is the doubtful future blackened by its darkest cloud? When is life least worth having, and death oftenest at the bedside? In the terrible morning hours, when the sun is rising in its glory, and the birds are singing in the stillness of the new-born day.

Anne woke in the strange bed, and looked round her, by the light of the new morning, at the strange room.

The rain had all fallen in the night. The sun was master in the clear autumn sky. She rose, and opened the window. The fresh morning air, keen and fragrant, filled the room. Far and near, the same bright stillness possessed the view. She stood at the window looking out. Her mind was clear again—she could think, she could feel; she could face the one last question which the merciless morning now forced on her—How will it end?

Was there any hope?—hope, for instance, in what she might do for herself. What can a

married woman do for herself? She can make her misery public—provided it be misery of a certain kind—and can reckon single-handed with Society when she has done it. Nothing more.

Was there hope in what others might do for her? Blanche might write to her—might even come and see her—if her husband allowed it; and that was all. Sir Patrick had pressed her hand at parting, and had told her to rely on him. He was the firmest, the truest of friends. But what could he do? There were outrages which her husband was privileged to commit, under the sanction of marriage, at the bare thought of which her blood ran cold. Could Sir Patrick protect her? Absurd! Law and Society armed her husband with his conjugal rights. Law and Society had but one answer to give, if she appealed to them—You are his wife.

No hope in herself; no hope in her friends; no hope anywhere on earth. Nothing to be done but to wait for the end—with faith in the Divine Mercy; with faith in the better world.

She took out of her trunk a little book of Prayers and Meditations—worn with much use—which had once belonged to her mother. She sat by the window reading it. Now and then she looked up from it—thinking. The parallel between her mother's position and her own position was now complete. Both married to husbands who hated them; to husbands whose interests pointed to mercenary alliances with other women; to husbands whose one want and one purpose was to be free from their wives. Strange;

what different ways had led mother and daughter both to the same fate! Would the parallel hold to the end? "Shall I die," she wondered, thinking of her mother's last moments, "in Blanche's arms?"

The time had passed unheeded. The morning movement in the house had failed to catch her ear. She was first called out of herself to the sense of the present and passing events by the voice of the servant-girl outside the door.

"The master wants you, ma'am, downstairs."

She rose instantly, and put away the little book.

"Is that all the message?" she asked, opening the door.

"Yes, ma'am."

She followed the girl downstairs; recalling to her memory the strange words addressed to her by Geoffrey, in the presence of the servants, on the evening before. Was she now to know what those words really meant? The doubt would soon be set at rest. "Be the trial what it may," she thought to herself, "let me bear it as my mother would have borne it."

The servant opened the door of the dining-room. Breakfast was on the table. Geoffrey was standing at the window. Hester Dethridge was waiting, posted near the door. He came forward—with the nearest approach to gentleness in his manner which she had ever yet seen in it—he came forward, with a set smile on his lips, and offered her his hand!

She had entered the room, prepared (as she believed) for anything that could happen. She was not prepared for this. She stood speechless, looking at him.

After one glance at her, when she came in, Hester Dethridge looked at him, too—and from that moment never looked away again, as long as Anne remained in the room.

He broke the silence—in a voice that was not like his own; with a furtive restraint in his manner which she had never noticed in it before.

“Won’t you shake hands with your husband,” he asked, “when your husband asks you?”

She mechanically put her hand in his. He dropped it instantly, with a start. “God! how cold!” he exclaimed. His own hand was burning hot, and shook incessantly.

He pointed to a chair at the head of the table.

“Will you make the tea?” he asked.

She had given him her hand mechanically; she advanced a step mechanically—and then stopped.

“Would you prefer breakfasting by yourself?” he said.

“If you please,” she answered, faintly.

“Wait a minute. I have something to say before you go.”

She waited. He considered with himself; consulting his memory—visibly, unmistakably, consulting it before he spoke again.

“I have had the night to think in,” he said. “The night has made a new man of me. I beg your pardon for what I said yesterday. I was

not myself yesterday. I talked nonsense yesterday. Please to forget it, and forgive it. I wish to turn over a new leaf, and make amends—make amends for my past conduct. It shall be my endeavor to be a good husband. In the presence of Mrs. Dethridge, I request you to give me a chance. I won't force your inclinations. We are married—what's the use of regretting it? Stay here, as you said yesterday, on your own terms. I wish to make it up. In the presence of Mrs. Dethridge, I say I wish to make it up. I won't detain you. I request you to think of it. Good-morning."

He said those extraordinary words like a slow boy saying a hard lesson—his eyes on the ground, his fingers restlessly fastening and unfastening a button on his waistcoat.

Anne left the room. In the passage she was obliged to wait, and support herself against the wall. His unnatural politeness was horrible; his carefully asserted repentance chilled her to the soul with dread. She had never felt—in the time of his fiercest anger and his foulest language—the unutterable horror of him that she felt now.

Hester Dethridge came out, closing the door behind her. She looked attentively at Anne—then wrote on her slate, and held it out, with these words on it:

"Do you believe him?"

Anne pushed the slate away, and ran upstairs. She fastened the door, and sank into a chair.

"He is plotting something against me," she said to herself. "What?"

A sickening, physical sense of dread—entirely new in her experience of herself—made her shrink from pursuing the question. The sinking at her heart turned her faint. She went to get the air at the open window.

At the same moment there was a ring at the gate-bell. Suspicious of anything and everything, she felt a sudden distrust of letting herself be seen. She drew back behind the curtain and looked out.

A man-servant, in livery, was let in. He had a letter in his hand. He said to the girl as he passed Anne's window, "I come from Lady Holchester; I must see Mr. Delamayn instantly."

They went in. There was an interval. The footman re-appeared, leaving the place. There was another interval. Then there came a knock at the door. Anne hesitated. The knock was repeated, and the dumb murmuring of Hester Dethridge was heard outside. Anne opened the door.

Hester came in with the breakfast. She pointed to a letter, among other things, on the tray. It was addressed to Anne, in Geoffrey's handwriting, and it contained these words:

"My father died yesterday. Write your orders for your mourning. The boy will take them. You are not to trouble yourself to go to London. Somebody is to come here to you from the shop."

Anne dropped the paper on her lap without looking up. At the same moment Hester Dethridge's slate was passed stealthily between her eyes and the note—with these words traced on

it: "His mother is coming to-day. His brother has been telegraphed from Scotland. He was drunk last night. He's drinking again. I know what that means. Look out, missus—look out!"

Anne signed to her to leave the room. She went out, pulling the door to, but not closing it behind her.

There was another ring at the gate-bell. Once more Anne went to the window. Only the lad this time—arriving to take his orders for the day. He had barely entered the garden when he was followed by the postman with letters. In a minute more Geoffrey's voice was heard in the passage, and Geoffrey's heavy step ascended the wooden stairs. Anne hurried across the room to draw the bolts. Geoffrey met her before she could close the door.

"A letter for you," he said, keeping scrupulously out of the room. "I don't wish to force your inclinations—I only request you to tell me who it's from."

His manner was as carefully subdued as ever. But the unacknowledged distrust in him (when he looked at her) betrayed itself in his eye.

She glanced at the handwriting on the address.

"From Blanche," she answered.

He softly put his foot between the door and the post—and waited until she had opened and read Blanche's letter.

"May I see it?" he asked—and put in his hand for it through the door.

The spirit in Anne which would once have

resisted him was dead in her now. She handed him the open letter.

It was very short. Excepting some brief expressions of fondness, it was studiously confined to stating the purpose for which it had been written. Blanche proposed to visit Anne that afternoon, accompanied by her uncle; she sent word beforehand, to make sure of finding Anne at home. That was all. The letter had evidently been written under Sir Patrick's advice.

Geoffrey handed it back, after first waiting a moment to think.

"My father died yesterday," he said. "My wife can't receive visitors before he is buried. I don't wish to force your inclinations. I only say I can't let visitors in here before the funeral—except my own family. Send a note downstairs. The lad will take it to your friend when he goes to London." With those words, he left her.

An appeal to the proprieties of life, in the mouth of Geoffrey Delamayn, could only mean one of two things. Either he had spoken in brutal mockery—or he had spoken with some ulterior object in view. Had he seized on the event of his father's death as a pretext for isolating his wife from all communication with the outer world? Were there reasons, which had not yet asserted themselves, for his dreading the result, if he allowed Anne to communicate with her friends?

The hour wore on, and Hester Dethridge appeared again. The lad was waiting for Anne's

orders for her mourning, and for her note to Mrs. Arnold Brinkworth.

Anne wrote the orders and the note. Once more the horrible slate appeared when she had done, between the writing-paper and her eyes, with the hard lines of warning pitilessly traced on it. "He has locked the gate. When there's a ring we are to come to him for the key. He has written to a woman. Name outside the letter, Mrs. Glenarm. He has had more brandy. Like my husband. Mind yourself."

The one way out of the high walls all round the cottage locked. Friends forbidden to see her. Solitary imprisonment, with her husband for a jailer. Before she had been four-and-twenty hours in the cottage it had come to that. And what was to follow?

She went back mechanically to the window. The sight of the outer world, the occasional view of a passing vehicle, helped to sustain her.

The lad appeared in the front garden departing to perform his errand to London. Geoffrey went with him to open the gate, and called after him, as he passed through it, "Don't forget the books!"

The "books?" What "books?" Who wanted them? The slightest thing now roused Anne's suspicion. For hours afterward the books haunted her mind.

He secured the gate and came back again. He stopped under Anne's window and called to her. She showed herself. "When you want air and exercise," he said, "the back garden is

at your own disposal." He put the key of the gate in his pocket and returned to the house.

After some hesitation, Anne decided on taking him at his word. In her state of suspense, to remain within the four walls of the bedroom was unendurable. If some lurking snare lay hid under the fair-sounding proposal which Geoffrey had made, it was less repellent to her boldly to prove what it might be than to wait pondering over it with her mind in the dark. She put on her hat and went down into the garden.

Nothing happened out of the common. Wherever he was, he never showed himself. She wandered up and down, keeping on the side of the garden which was furthest from the dining-room window. To a woman, escape from the place was simply impossible. Setting out of the question the height of the walls, they were armed at the top with a thick setting of jagged broken glass. A small back door in the end wall (intended probably for the gardener's use) was bolted and locked—the key having been taken out. There was not a house near. The lands of the local growers of vegetables surrounded the garden on all sides. In the nineteenth century, and in the immediate neighborhood of a great metropolis, Anne was as absolutely isolated from all contact with the humanity around her as if she lay in her grave.

After the lapse of half an hour, the silence was broken by a noise of carriage-wheels on the public road in front, and a ring at the bell. Anne kept close to the cottage, at the back; deter-

mined, if a chance offered, on speaking to the visitor, whoever the visitor might be.

She heard voices in the dining-room through the open window—Geoffrey's voice and the voice of a woman. Who was the woman? Not Mrs. Glenarm, surely? After a while the visitor's voice was suddenly raised. "Where is she?" it said. "I wish to see her." Anne instantly advanced to the back door of the house, and found herself face to face with a lady who was a total stranger to her.

"Are you my son's wife?" asked the lady.

"I am your son's prisoner," Anne answered.

Lady Holchester's pale face turned paler still. It was plain that Anne's reply had confirmed some doubt in the mother's mind which had been already suggested to it by the son.

"What do you mean?" she asked, in a whisper.

Geoffrey's heavy footsteps crossed the dining-room. There was no time to explain. Anne whispered back:

"Tell my friends what I have told you."

Geoffrey appeared at the dining-room door.

"Name one of your friends," said Lady Holchester.

"Sir Patrick Lundie."

Geoffrey heard the answer. "What about Sir Patrick Lundie?" he asked.

"I wish to see Sir Patrick Lundie," said his mother. "And your wife can tell me where to find him."

Anne instantly understood that Lady Holchester would communicate with Sir Patrick.

She mentioned his London address. Lady Holchester turned to leave the cottage. Her son stopped her.

“Let’s set things straight,” he said, “before you go. My mother,” he went on, addressing himself to Anne, “don’t think there’s much chance for us two of living comfortably together. Bear witness to the truth—will you? What did I tell you at breakfast-time? Didn’t I say it should be my endeavor to make you a good husband? Didn’t I say—in Mrs. Dethridge’s presence—I wanted to make it up?” He waited until Anne had answered in the affirmative, and then appealed to his mother. “Well? what do you think now?”

Lady Holchester declined to reveal what she thought. “You shall see me, or hear from me, this evening,” she said to Anne. Geoffrey attempted to repeat his unanswered question. His mother looked at him. His eyes instantly dropped before hers. She gravely bent her head to Anne, and drew her veil. Her son followed her out in silence to the gate.

Anne returned to her room, sustained by the first sense of relief which she had felt since the morning. “His mother is alarmed,” she said to herself. “A change will come.”

A change *was* to come—with the coming night.

CHAPTER THE FIFTY-FIRST.

THE PROPOSAL.

TOWARD sunset, Lady Holchester's carriage drew up before the gate of the cottage.

Three persons occupied the carriage: Lady Holchester, her eldest son (now Lord Holchester), and Sir Patrick Lundie.

"Will you wait in the carriage, Sir Patrick?" said Julius. "Or will you come in?"

"I will wait. If I can be of the least use to *her*, send for me instantly. In the meantime, don't forget to make the stipulation which I have suggested. It is the one certain way of putting your brother's real feeling in this matter to the test."

The servant had rung the bell without producing any result. He rang again. Lady Holchester put a question to Sir Patrick.

"If I have an opportunity of speaking to my son's wife alone," she said, "have you any message to give?"

Sir Patrick produced a little note.

"May I appeal to your ladyship's kindness to give her this?" The gate was opened by the servant-girl, as Lady Holchester took the note. "Remember," reiterated Sir Patrick, earnestly, "if I can be of the smallest service to her—don't think of my position with Mr. Delamayn. Send for me at once."

Julius and his mother were conducted into the

drawing-room. The girl informed them that her master had gone upstairs to lie down, and that he would be with them immediately.

Both mother and son were too anxious to speak. Julius wandered uneasily about the room. Some books attracted his notice on a table in the corner—four dirty, greasy volumes, with a slip of paper projecting from the leaves of one of them, and containing this inscription, “With Mr. Perry’s respects.” Julius opened the volume. It was the ghastly popular record of Criminal Trials in England, called the Newgate Calendar. Julius showed it to his mother.

“Geoffrey’s taste in literature!” he said, with a faint smile.

Lady Holchester signed to him to put the book back.

“You have seen Geoffrey’s wife already—have you not?” she asked.

There was no contempt now in her tone when she referred to Anne. The impression produced on her by her visit to the cottage, earlier in the day, associated Geoffrey’s wife with family anxieties of no trivial kind. She might still (for Mrs. Glenarm’s sake) be a woman to be disliked—but she was no longer a woman to be despised.

“I saw her when she came to Swanhaven,” said Julius. “I agree with Sir Patrick in thinking her a very interesting person.”

“What did Sir Patrick say to you about Geoffrey this afternoon—while I was out of the room?”

“Only what he said to *you*. He thought their

position toward each other here a very deplorable one. He considered that the reasons were serious for our interfering immediately."

"Sir Patrick's own opinion, Julius, goes further than that."

"He has not acknowledged it, that I know of."

"How *can* he acknowledge it—to us?"

The door opened, and Geoffrey entered the room.

Julius eyed him closely as they shook hands. His eyes were bloodshot; his face was flushed; his utterance was thick—the look of him was the look of a man who had been drinking hard.

"Well," he said to his mother, "what brings you back?"

"Julius has a proposal to make to you," Lady Holchester answered. "I approve of it; and I have come with him."

Geoffrey turned to his brother.

"What can a rich man like you want of a poor devil like me?" he asked.

"I want to do you justice, Geoffrey—if you will help me, by meeting me half way. Our mother has told you about the will?"

"I'm not down for a halfpenny in the will. I expected as much. Go on."

"You are wrong—you *are* down in it. There is liberal provision made for you in a codicil. Unhappily, my father died without signing it. It is needless to say that I consider it binding on me for all that. I am ready to do for you what your father would have done for you; and I only ask for one concession in return."

“What may that be?”

“You are living here very unhappily, Geoffrey, with your wife.”

“Who says so? I don’t, for one.”

Julius laid his hand kindly on his brother’s arm.

“Don’t trifle with such a serious matter as this,” he said. “Your marriage is, in every sense of the word, a misfortune—not only to you but to your wife. It is impossible that you can live together. I have come here to ask you to consent to a separation. Do that, and the provision made for you in the unsigned codicil is yours. What do you say?”

Geoffrey shook his brother’s hand off his arm.

“I say—No!” he answered.

Lady Holchester interfered for the first time.

“Your brother’s generous offer deserves a better answer than that,” she said.

“My answer,” reiterated Geoffrey, “is—No!”

He sat between them with his clinched fists resting on his knees—absolutely impenetrable to anything that either of them could say.

“In your situation,” said Julius, “a refusal is sheer madness. I won’t accept it.”

“Do as you like about that. My mind’s made up. I won’t let my wife be taken away from me. Here she stays.”

The brutal tone in which he had made that reply roused Lady Holchester’s indignation.

“Take care!” she said. “You are not only behaving with the grossest ingratitude toward your brother—you are forcing a suspicion into

your mother's mind. You have some motive that you are hiding from us."

He turned on his mother with a sudden ferocity which made Julius spring to his feet. The next instant his eyes were on the ground, and the devil that possessed him was quiet again.

"Some motive I'm hiding from you?" he repeated, with his head down and his utterance thicker than ever. "I'm ready to have my motive posted all over London, if you like. I'm fond of her."

He looked up as he said the last words. Lady Holchester turned away her head—recoiling from her own son. So overwhelming was the shock inflicted on her that even the strongly rooted prejudice which Mrs. Glenarm had implanted in her mind yielded to it. At that moment she absolutely pitied Anne!

"Poor creature!" said Lady Holchester.

He took instant offense at those two words. "I won't have my wife pitied by anybody." With that reply he dashed into the passage, and called out, "Anne! come down!"

Her soft voice answered; her light footfall was heard on the stairs. She came into the room. Julius advanced, took her hand, and held it kindly in his. "We are having a little family discussion," he said, trying to give her confidence. "And Geoffrey is getting hot over it, as usual."

Geoffrey appealed sternly to his mother.

"Look at her!" he said. "Is she starved? Is she in rags? Is she covered with bruises?" He

turned to Anne. "They have come here to propose a separation. They both believe I hate you. I don't hate you. I'm a good Christian. I owe it to you that I'm cut out of my father's will. I forgive you that. I owe it to you that I've lost the chance of marrying a woman with ten thousand a year. I forgive you *that*. I'm not a man who does things by halves. I said it should be my endeavor to make you a good husband. I said it was my wish to make it up. Well! I am as good as my word. And what's the consequence? I am insulted. My mother comes here, and my brother comes here—and they offer me money to part from you. Money be hanged! I'll be beholden to nobody. I'll get my own living. Shame on the people who interfere between man and wife! Shame!—that's what I say—shame!"

Anne looked for an explanation from her husband to her husband's mother.

"Have you proposed a separation between us?" she asked.

"Yes—on terms of the utmost advantage to my son; arranged with every possible consideration toward you. Is there any objection on your side?"

"Oh, Lady Holchester! is it necessary to ask me? What does he say?"

"He has refused."

"Refused?"

"Yes," said Geoffrey. "I don't go back from my word; I stick to what I said this morning. It's my endeavor to make you a good husband.

It's my wish to make it up." He paused, and then added his last reason: "I'm fond of you."

Their eyes met as he said it to her. Julius felt Anne's hand suddenly tighten round his. The desperate grasp of the frail cold fingers, the imploring terror in the gentle, sensitive face as it slowly turned his way, said to him as if in words, "Don't leave me friendless to-night!"

"If you both stop here till doomsday," said Geoffrey, "you'll get nothing more out of me. You have had my reply."

With that he seated himself doggedly in a corner of the room; waiting—ostentatiously waiting—for his mother and his brother to take their leave. The position was serious. To argue the matter with him that night was hopeless. To invite Sir Patrick's interference would only be to provoke his savage temper to a new outbreak. On the other hand, to leave the helpless woman, after what had passed, without another effort to befriend her, was, in her situation, an act of downright inhumanity, and nothing less. Julius took the one way out of the difficulty that was left—the one way worthy of him as a compassionate and an honorable man.

"We will drop it for to-night, Geoffrey," he said. "But I am not the less resolved, in spite of all that you have said, to return to the subject to-morrow. It would save me some inconvenience—a second journey here from town, and then going back again to my engagements—if I stayed with you to-night. Can you give me a bed?"

A look flashed on him from Anne, which thanked him as no words could have thanked him.

“Give you a bed?” repeated Geoffrey. He checked himself, on the point of refusing. His mother was watching him; his wife was watching him—and his wife knew that the room above them was a room to spare. “All right!” he resumed in another tone, with his eye on his mother. “There’s an empty room upstairs. Have it, if you like. You won’t find I’ve changed my mind to-morrow; but that’s your look-out. Stop here, if the fancy takes you. I’ve no objection. It don’t matter to Me.—Will you trust his lordship under my roof?” he added, addressing his mother. “I might have some motive that I’m hiding from you, you know!” Without waiting for an answer, he turned to Anne. “Go and tell old Dummy to put the sheets on the bed. Say there’s a live lord in the house—she’s to send in something devilish good for supper!”

He burst fiercely into a forced laugh. Lady Holchester rose at the moment when Anne was leaving the room.

“I shall not be here when you return,” she said. “Let me bid you good-night.”

She shook hands with Anne—giving her Sir Patrick’s note, unseen, at the same moment. Anne left the room. Without addressing another word to her second son, Lady Holchester beckoned to Julius to give her his arm. “You have acted nobly toward your brother,” she

said to him. "My one comfort and my one hope, Julius, are in you." They went out together to the gate, Geoffrey following them with the key in his hand. "Don't be too anxious," Julius whispered to his mother. "I will keep the drink out of his way to-night, and I will bring you a better account of him to-morrow. Explain everything to Sir Patrick as you go home." He handed Lady Holchester into the carriage, and re-entered, leaving Geoffrey to lock the gate.

The brothers returned in silence to the cottage. Julius had concealed it from his mother—but he was seriously uneasy in secret. Naturally prone to look at all things on their brighter side, he could place no hopeful interpretation on what Geoffrey had said and done that night. The conviction that he was deliberately acting a part, in his present relations with his wife, for some abominable purpose of his own, had rooted itself firmly in Julius. For the first time in his experience of his brother, the pecuniary consideration was not the uppermost consideration in Geoffrey's mind.

They went back into the drawing-room.

"What will you have to drink?" said Geoffrey.

"Nothing."

"You won't keep me company over a drop of brandy-and-water?"

"No. You have had enough brandy-and-water."

After a moment of frowning self-consideration in the glass, Geoffrey abruptly agreed with Ju-

lius. "I look like it," he said. "I'll soon put that right." He disappeared, and returned with a wet towel tied round his head. "What will you do while the women are getting your bed ready? Liberty Hall here. I've taken to cultivating my mind—I'm a reformed character, you know, now I'm a married man. You do what you like. I shall read."

He turned to the side-table; and, producing the volumes of the Newgate Calendar, gave one to his brother. Julius handed it back again.

"You won't cultivate your mind," he said, "with such a book as that. Vile actions, recorded in vile English, make vile reading, Geoffrey, in every sense of the word."

"It will do for me. I don't know good English when I see it."

With that frank acknowledgment—to which the great majority of his companions at school and college might have subscribed without doing the slightest injustice to the present state of English education—Geoffrey drew his chair to the table, and opened one of the volumes of his record of crime.

The evening newspaper was lying on the sofa. Julius took it up, and seated himself opposite to his brother. He noticed, with some surprise, that Geoffrey appeared to have a special object in consulting his book. Instead of beginning at the first page, he ran the leaves through his fingers, and turned them down at certain places before he entered on his reading. If Julius had looked over his brother's shoulder, instead of

only looking at him across the table, he would have seen that Geoffrey passed by all the lighter crimes reported in the Calendar, and marked for his own private reading the cases of murder only.

CHAPTER THE FIFTY-SECOND.

THE APPARITION.

THE night had advanced. It was close on twelve o'clock, when Anne heard the servant's voice, outside her bedroom door, asking leave to speak with her for a moment.

"What is it?"

"The gentleman downstairs wishes to see you, ma'am."

"Do you mean Mr. Delamayn's brother?"

"Yes."

"Where is Mr. Delamayn?"

"Out in the garden, ma'am."

Anne went downstairs, and found Julius alone in the drawing-room.

"I am sorry to disturb you," he said. "I am afraid Geoffrey is ill. The landlady has gone to bed, I am told—and I don't know where to apply for medical assistance. Do you know of any doctor in the neighborhood?"

Anne, like Julius, was a perfect stranger to the neighborhood. She suggested making inquiry of the servant. On speaking to the girl, it turned out that she knew of a medical man,

living within ten minutes' walk of the cottage. She could give plain directions enabling any person to find the place—but she was afraid, at that hour of the night and in that lonely neighborhood, to go out by herself.

“Is he seriously ill?” Anne asked.

“He is in such a state of nervous irritability,” said Julius, “that he can't remain still for two moments together in the same place. It began with incessant restlessness while he was reading here. I persuaded him to go to bed. He couldn't lie still for an instant—he came down again, burning with fever, and more restless than ever. He is out in the garden in spite of everything I could do to prevent him; trying, as he says, to 'run it off.' It appears to be serious to *me*. Come and judge for yourself.”

He led Anne into the next room, and, opening the shutter, pointed to the garden.

The clouds had cleared off; the night was fine. The clear starlight showed Geoffrey, stripped to his shirt and drawers, running round and round the garden. He apparently believed himself to be contending at the Fulham foot-race: at times, as the white figure circled round and round in the starlight, they heard him cheering for “the South.” The slackening thump of his feet on the ground, the heavier and heavier gasps in which he drew his breath, as he passed the window, gave warning that his strength was failing him. Exhaustion, if it led to no worse consequences, would force him to return to the house. In the state of his brain at that moment, who

could say what the result might be, if medical help was not called in?

“I will go for the doctor,” said Julius, “if you don’t mind my leaving you.”

It was impossible for Anne to set any apprehensions of her own against the plain necessity for summoning assistance. They found the key of the gate in the pocket of Geoffrey’s coat upstairs. Anne went with Julius to let him out. “How can I thank you!” she said, gratefully. “What should I have done without *you!*”

“I won’t be a moment longer than I can help,” he answered, and left her.

She secured the gate again, and went back to the cottage. The servant met her at the door, and proposed calling up Hester Dethridge.

“We don’t know what the master may do while his brother’s away,” said the girl. “And one more of us isn’t one too many, when we are only women in the house.”

“You are quite right,” said Anne. “Wake your mistress.”

After ascending the stairs, they looked out into the garden, through the window at the end of the passage on the upper floor. He was still going round and round, but very slowly: his pace was fast slackening to a walk.

Anne went back to her room and waited near the open door—ready to close and fasten it instantly if anything occurred to alarm her. “How changed I am!” she thought to herself. “Everything frightens me now.”

The inference was the natural one, but not the

true one. The change was not in herself, but in the situation in which she was placed. Her position during the investigation at Lady Lundie's house had tried her moral courage only. It had exacted from her one of those noble efforts of self-sacrifice which the hidden forces in a woman's nature are essentially capable of making. Her position at the cottage tried her physical courage: it called on her to rise superior to the sense of actual bodily danger—while that danger was lurking in the dark. There, the woman's nature sank under the stress laid on it—there, her courage could strike no root in the strength of her love—there, the animal instincts were the instincts appealed to; and the firmness wanted was the firmness of a man.

Hester Dethridge's door opened. She walked straight into Anne's room.

The yellow, clay-cold color of her face showed a faint flush of warmth; its death-like stillness was stirred by a touch of life. The stony eyes, fixed as ever in their gaze, shone strangely with a dim inner luster. Her gray hair, so neatly arranged at other times, was in disorder under her cap. All her movements were quicker than usual. Something had roused the stagnant vitality in the woman—it was working in her mind; it was forcing itself outward into her face. The servants at Windygates, in past times, had seen these signs, and had known them for a warning to leave Hester Dethridge to herself.

Anne asked her if she had heard what had happened.

She bowed her head.

“I hope you don’t mind being disturbed?”

She wrote on her slate: “I’m glad to be disturbed. I have been dreaming bad dreams. It’s good for me to be wakened, when sleep takes me backward in my life. What’s wrong with you? Frightened?”

“Yes.”

She wrote again, and pointed toward the garden with one hand, while she held the slate up with the other: “Frightened of *him*?”

“Terribly frightened.”

She wrote for the third time, and offered the slate to Anne with a ghastly smile: “I have been through it all. I know. You’re only at the beginning now. He’ll put the wrinkles in your face, and the gray in your hair. There will come a time when you’ll wish yourself dead and buried. You will live through it, for all that. Look at Me.”

As she read the last three words, Anne heard the garden door below opened and banged to again. She caught Hester Dethridge by the arm, and listened. The tramp of Geoffrey’s feet, staggering heavily in the passage, gave token of his approach to the stairs. He was talking to himself, still possessed by the delusion that he was at the foot-race. “Five to four on Delamayn. Delamayn’s won. Three cheers for the South, and one cheer more. Devilish long race. Night already! Perry! where’s Perry?”

He advanced, staggering from side to side of the passage. The stairs below creaked as he set

his foot on them. Hester Dethridge dragged herself free from Anne, advanced, with her candle in her hand, and threw open Geoffrey's bedroom door; returned to the head of the stairs; and stood there, firm as a rock, waiting for him. He looked up, as he set his foot on the next stair, and met the view of Hester's face, brightly illuminated by the candle, looking down at him. On the instant he stopped, rooted to the place on which he stood. "Ghost! witch! devil!" he cried out, "take your eyes off me!" He shook his fist at her furiously, with an oath—sprang back into the hall—and shut himself into the dining-room from the sight of her. The panic which had seized him once already in the kitchen-garden at Windygates, under the eyes of the dumb cook, had fastened its hold on him once more. Frightened—absolutely frightened—of Hester Dethridge!

The gate-bell rang. Julius had returned with the doctor.

Anne gave the key to the girl to let them in. Hester wrote on her slate, as composedly as if nothing had happened: "They'll find me in the kitchen, if they want me. I shan't go back to my bedroom. My bedroom's full of bad dreams." She descended the stairs. Anne waited in the upper passage, looking over into the hall below. "Your brother is in the drawing-room," she called down to Julius. "The landlady is in the kitchen, if you want her." She returned to her room, and waited for what might happen next. After a brief interval she heard the drawing-

room door open, and the voices of the men outside. There seemed to be some difficulty in persuading Geoffrey to ascend the stairs; he persisted in declaring that Hester Dethridge was waiting for him at the top of them. After a little they persuaded him that the way was free. Anne heard them ascend the stairs and close his bedroom door.

Another and a longer interval passed before the door opened again. The doctor was going away. He said his parting words to Julius in the passage. "Look in at him from time to time through the night, and give him another dose of the sedative mixture if he wakes. There is nothing to be alarmed about in the restlessness and the fever. They are only the outward manifestations of some serious mischief hidden under them. Send for the medical man who has last attended him. Knowledge of the patient's constitution is very important knowledge in this case."

As Julius returned from letting the doctor out, Anne met him in the hall. She was at once struck by the worn look in his face, and by the fatigue which expressed itself in all his movements.

"You want rest," she said. "Pray go to your room. I have heard what the doctor said to you. Leave it to the landlady and to me to sit up."

Julius owned that he had been traveling from Scotland during the previous night. But he was unwilling to abandon the responsibility of watching his brother. "You are not strong enough,

I am sure, to take my place," he said, kindly. "And Geoffrey has some unreasoning horror of the landlady, which makes it very undesirable that he should see her again, in his present state. I will go up to my room, and rest on the bed. If you hear anything, you have only to come and call me."

An hour more passed.

Anne went to Geoffrey's door and listened. He was stirring in his bed, and muttering to himself. She went on to the door of the next room, which Julius had left partly open. Fatigue had overpowered him; she heard, within, the quiet breathing of a man in a sound sleep. Anne turned back again, resolved not to disturb him.

At the head of the stairs she hesitated—not knowing what to do. Her horror of entering Geoffrey's room by herself was insurmountable. But who else was to do it? The girl had gone to bed. The reason which Julius had given for not employing the assistance of Hester Dethridge was unanswerable. She listened again at Geoffrey's door. No sound was now audible in the room to a person in the passage outside. Would it be well to look in, and make sure that he had only fallen asleep again? She hesitated once more—she was still hesitating, when Hester Dethridge appeared from the kitchen.

She joined Anne at the top of the stairs—looked at her—and wrote a line on her slate: "Frightened to go in? Leave it to Me."

The silence in the room justified the inference

that he was asleep. If Hester looked in, Hester could do no harm how. Anne accepted the proposal.

“If you find anything wrong,” she said, “don’t disturb his brother. Come to me first.”

With that caution she withdrew. It was then nearly two in the morning. She, like Julius, was sinking from fatigue. After waiting a little, and hearing nothing, she threw herself on the sofa in her room. If anything happened, a knock at the door would rouse her instantly.

In the meanwhile Hester Dethridge opened Geoffrey’s bedroom door and went in.

The movements and the mutterings which Anne had heard had been movements and mutterings in his sleep. The doctor’s composing draught, partially disturbed in its operation for the moment only, had recovered its sedative influence on his brain. Geoffrey was in a deep and quiet sleep.

Hester stood near the door, looking at him. She moved to go out again—stopped—and fixed her eyes suddenly on one of the inner corners of the room.

The same sinister change which had passed over her once already in Geoffrey’s presence, when they met in the kitchen-garden at Windygates, now passed over her again. Her closed lips dropped apart. Her eyes slowly dilated—moved, inch by inch, from the corner, following something along the empty wall, in the direction of the bed—stopped at the head of the bed, exactly

above Geoffrey's sleeping face — stared, rigid and glittering, as if they saw a sight of horror close over it. He sighed faintly in his sleep. The sound, slight as it was, broke the spell that held her. She slowly lifted her withered hands, and wrung them above her head; fled back across the passage; and, rushing into her room, sank on her knees at the bedside.

Now, in the dead of night, a strange thing happened. Now, in the silence and the darkness, a hideous secret was revealed.

In the sanctuary of her own room—with all the other inmates of the house sleeping round her—the dumb woman threw off the mysterious and terrible disguise under which she deliberately isolated herself among her fellow-creatures in the hours of the day. Hester Dethridge spoke. In low, thick, smothered accents—in a wild litany of her own—she prayed. She called upon the mercy of God for deliverance from herself; for a deliverance from the possession of the Devil; for blindness to fall on her, for death to strike her, so that she might never see that unnamed Horror more! Sobs shook the whole frame of the stony woman, whom nothing human moved at other times. Tears poured over those clay-cold cheeks. One by one the frantic words of her prayer died away on her lips. Fierce shuddering fits shook her from head to foot. She started up from her knees in the darkness. Light! light! light! The unnamed Horror was behind her in his room. The unnamed Horror was looking at her through his open door. She

found the match-box, and lighted the candle on her table—lighted the two other candles set for ornament only on the mantel-piece—and looked all round the brightly-lighted little room. “Aha!” she said to herself, wiping the cold sweat of her agony from her face. “Candles to other people. God’s light to *me*. Nothing to be seen! nothing to be seen!” Taking one of the candles in her hand, she crossed the passage, with her head down, turned her back on Geoffrey’s open door, closed it quickly and softly, stretching out her hand behind her, and retreated again to her own room. She fastened the door, and took an ink-bottle and a pen from the mantel-piece. After considering for a moment, she hung a handkerchief over the key-hole, and laid an old shawl longwise at the bottom of the door, so as to hide the light in her room from the observation of any one in the house who might wake and come that way. This done, she opened the upper part of her dress, and, slipping her fingers into a secret pocket hidden in the inner side of her stays, produced from it some neatly folded leaves of thin paper. Spread out on the table, the leaves revealed themselves—all but the last—as closely covered with writing, in her own hand.

The first leaf was headed by this inscription: “My Confession. To be put into my coffin, and to be buried with me when I die.”

She turned the manuscript over, so as to get at the last page. The greater part of it was left blank. A few lines of writing, at the top, bore the date of the day of the week and month on

which Lady Lundie had dismissed her from her situation at Windygates. The entry was expressed in these terms :

“I have seen IT again to-day. The first time for two months past. In the kitchen-garden. Standing behind the young gentleman whose name is Delamayn. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. I have resisted. By prayer. By meditation in solitude. By reading good books. I have left my place. I have lost sight of the young gentleman for good. Who will IT stand behind? and point to next? Lord have mercy upon me! Christ have mercy upon me!”

Under this she now added the following lines, first carefully prefixing the date :

“I have seen IT again to-night. I notice one awful change. IT has appeared twice behind the same person. This has never happened before. This makes the temptation more terrible than ever. To-night, in his bedroom, between the bed-head and the wall, I have seen IT behind young Mr. Delamayn again. The head just above his face, and the finger pointing downward at his throat. Twice behind this one man. And never twice behind any other living creature till now. If I see IT a third time behind him—Lord deliver me! Christ deliver me! I daren’t think of it. He shall leave my cottage to-morrow. I would fain have drawn back from the bargain, when the stranger took the lodgings for his friend, and the friend proved to be Mr. Delamayn. I didn’t like it, even then. After the warning to-night, my mind is made up. He

shall go. He may have his money back, if he likes. He shall go. (Memorandum: Felt the temptation whispering this time, and the terror tearing at me all the while, as I have never felt them yet. Resisted, as before, by prayer. Am now going downstairs to meditate against it in solitude—to fortify myself against it by good books. Lord be merciful to me a sinner!)”

In those words she closed the entry, and put the manuscript back in the secret pocket in her stays.

She went down to the little room, looking on the garden, which had once been her brother's study. There she lighted a lamp, and took some books from a shelf that hung against the wall. The books were the Bible, a volume of Methodist sermons, and a set of collected Memoirs of Methodist saints. Ranging these last carefully round her, in an order of her own, Hester Dethridge sat down with the Bible on her lap to watch out the night.

CHAPTER THE FIFTY-THIRD.

WHAT had happened in the hours of darkness?

This was Anne's first thought, when the sunlight poured in at her window, and woke her the next morning.

She made immediate inquiry of the servant. The girl could only speak for herself. Nothing had occurred to disturb her after she had gone to

bed. Her master was still, she believed, in his room. Mrs. Dethridge was at her work in the kitchen.

Anne went to the kitchen. Hester Dethridge was at her usual occupation at that time—preparing the breakfast. The slight signs of animation which Anne had noticed in her when they last met appeared no more. The dull look was back again in her stony eyes; the lifeless torpor possessed all her movements. Asked if anything had happened in the night, she slowly shook her stolid head, slowly made the sign with her hand which signified, “Nothing.”

Leaving the kitchen, Anne saw Julius in the front garden. She went out and joined him.

“I believe I have to thank your consideration for me for some hours of rest,” he said. “It was five in the morning when I woke. I hope you had no reason to regret having left me to sleep? I went into Geoffrey’s room, and found him stirring. A second dose of the mixture composed him again. The fever has gone. He looks weaker and paler, but in other respects like himself. We will return directly to the question of his health. I have something to say to you, first, about a change which may be coming in your life here.”

“Has he consented to the separation?”

“No. He is as obstinate about it as ever. I have placed the matter before him in every possible light. He still refuses, positively refuses, a provision which would make him an independent man for life.”

“Is it the provision he might have had, Lord Holchester, if—?”

“If he had married Mrs. Glenarm? No. It is impossible, consistently with my duty to my mother, and with what I owe to the position in which my father’s death has placed me, that I can offer him such a fortune as Mrs. Glenarm’s. Still, it is a handsome income which he is mad enough to refuse. I shall persist in pressing it on him. He must and shall take it.”

Anne felt no reviving hope roused in her by his last words. She turned to another subject.

“You had something to tell me,” she said. “You spoke of a change.”

“True. The landlady here is a very strange person; and she has done a very strange thing. She has given Geoffrey notice to quit these lodgings.”

“Notice to quit?” Anne repeated, in amazement.

“Yes. In a formal letter. She handed it to me open, as soon as I was up this morning. It was impossible to get any explanation from her. The poor dumb creature simply wrote on her slate: ‘He may have his money back, if he likes: he shall go!’ Greatly to my surprise (for the woman inspires him with the strongest aversion) Geoffrey refuses to go until his term is up. I have made the peace between them for to-day. Mrs. Dethridge, very reluctantly, consents to give him four-and-twenty hours. And there the matter rests at present.”

“What can her motive be?” said Anne.

“It’s useless to inquire. Her mind is evidently off its balance. One thing is clear, Geoffrey cannot keep you here much longer. The coming change will remove you from this dismal place—which is one thing gained. And it is quite possible that new scenes and new surroundings may have their influence on Geoffrey for good. His conduct—otherwise quite incomprehensible—may be the result of some latent nervous irritation which medical help might reach. I don’t attempt to disguise from myself, or from you, that your position here is a most deplorable one. But before we despair of the future, let us at least inquire whether there is any explanation of my brother’s present behavior to be found in the present state of my brother’s health. I have been considering what the doctor said to me last night. The first thing to do is to get the best medical advice on Geoffrey’s case which is to be had. What do you think?”

“I daren’t tell you what I think, Lord Holchester. I will try—it is a very small return to make for your kindness—I will try to see my position with your eyes, not with mine. The best medical advice that you can obtain is the advice of Mr. Speedwell. It was he who first made the discovery that your brother was in broken health.”

“The very man for our purpose! I will send him here to-day or to-morrow. Is there anything else I can do for you? I shall see Sir Patrick as soon as I get to town. Have you any message for him?”

Anne hesitated. Looking attentively at her, Julius noticed that she changed color when he mentioned Sir Patrick's name.

"Will you say that I gratefully thank him for the letter which Lady Holchester was so good as to give me last night," she replied. "And will you entreat him, from me, not to expose himself, on my account, to—" she hesitated, and finished the sentence with her eyes on the ground—"to what might happen, if he came here and insisted on seeing me."

"Does he propose to do that?"

She hesitated again. The little nervous contraction of her lips at one side of the mouth became more marked than usual. "He writes that his anxiety is unendurable, and that he is resolved to see me," she answered, softly.

"He is likely to hold to his resolution, I think," said Julius. "When I saw him yesterday, Sir Patrick spoke of you in terms of admiration—"

He stopped. The bright tears were glittering on Anne's eyelashes; one of her hands was toying nervously with something hidden (possibly Sir Patrick's letter) in the bosom of her dress. "I thank him with my whole heart," she said, in low, faltering tones. "But it is best that he should not come here."

"Would you like to write to him?"

"I think I should prefer your giving him my message."

Julius understood that the subject was to proceed no further. Sir Patrick's letter had produced some impression on her, which the sensi-

tive nature of the woman seemed to shrink from acknowledging, even to herself. They turned back to enter the cottage. At the door they were met by a surprise. Hester Dethridge, with her bonnet on—dressed, at that hour of the morning, to go out!

“Are you going to market already?” Anne asked.

Hester shook her head.

“When are you coming back?”

Hester wrote on her slate: “Not till the night-time.”

Without another word of explanation she pulled her veil down over her face, and made for the gate. The key had been left in the dining-room by Julius, after he had let the doctor out. Hester had it in her hand. She opened the gate, and closed the door after her, leaving the key in the lock. At the moment when the door banged to Geoffrey appeared in the passage.

“Where’s the key?” he asked. “Who’s gone out?”

His brother answered the question. He looked backward and forward suspiciously between Julius and Anne. “What does she go out for at this time?” he said. “Has she left the house to avoid Me?”

Julius thought this the likely explanation. Geoffrey went down sulkily to the gate to lock it, and returned to them, with the key in his pocket.

“I’m obliged to be careful of the gate,” he said. “The neighborhood swarms with beggars and tramps. If you want to go out,” he added,

turning pointedly to Anne, "I'm at your service, as a good husband ought to be."

After a hurried breakfast Julius took his departure. "I don't accept your refusal," he said to his brother, before Anne. "You will see me here again."

Geoffrey obstinately repeated the refusal. "If you come here every day of your life," he said, "it will be just the same."

The gate closed on Julius. Anne returned again to the solitude of her own chamber. Geoffrey entered the drawing-room, placed the volumes of the Newgate Calendar on the table before him, and resumed the reading which he had been unable to continue on the evening before.

Hour after hour he doggedly plodded through one case of murder after another. He had read one good half of the horrid chronicle of crime before his power of fixing his attention began to fail him. Then he lighted his pipe, and went out to think over it in the garden. However the atrocities of which he had been reading might differ in other respects, there was one terrible point of resemblance, which he had not anticipated, and in which every one of the cases agreed. Sooner or later, there was the dead body always certain to be found; always bearing its dumb witness, in the traces of poison or in the marks of violence, to the crime committed on it.

He walked to and fro slowly, still pondering over the problem which had first found its way into his mind when he had stopped in the front garden, and had looked up at Anne's window in

the dark. "How?" That had been the one question before him, from the time when the lawyer had annihilated his hopes of a divorce. It remained the one question still. There was no answer to it in his own brain; there was no answer to it in the book which he had been consulting. Everything was in his favor, if he could only find out "how." He had got his hated wife upstairs at his mercy—thanks to his refusal of the money which Julius had offered to him. He was living in a place absolutely secluded from public observation on all sides of it—thanks to his resolution to remain at the cottage even after his landlady had insulted him by sending him a notice to quit. Everything had been prepared, everything had been sacrificed to the fulfilment of one purpose—and how to attain that purpose was still the same impenetrable mystery to him which it had been from the first!

What was the other alternative? To accept the proposal which Julius had made. In other words, to give up his vengeance on Anne, and to turn his back on the splendid future which Mrs. Glenarm's devotion still offered to him.

Never! He would go back to the books. He was not at the end of them. The slightest hint in the pages which were still to be read might set his sluggish brain working in the right direction. The way to be rid of her, without exciting the suspicion of any living creature, in the house or out of it, was a way that might be found yet.

Could a man, in his position of life, reason in this brutal manner? could he act in this merciless way? Surely the thought of what he was about to do must have troubled him this time!

Pause for a moment—and look back at him in the past.

Did he feel any remorse when he was plotting the betrayal of Arnold in the garden at Windygates? The sense which feels remorse had not been put into him. What he is now is the legitimate consequence of what he was then. A far more serious temptation is now urging him to commit a far more serious crime. How is he to resist? Will his skill in rowing (as Sir Patrick once put it), his swiftness in running, his admirable capacity and endurance in other physical exercises, help him to win a purely moral victory over his own selfishness and his own cruelty? No! The moral and mental neglect of himself, which the material tone of public feeling about him has tacitly encouraged, has left him at the mercy of the worst instincts in his nature—of all that is most vile and of all that is most dangerous in the composition of the natural man. With the mass of his fellows, no harm out of the common has come of this, because no temptation out of the common has passed their way. But with *him*, the case is reversed. A temptation out of the common has passed *his* way. How does it find him prepared to meet it? It finds him, literally and exactly, what his training has left him, in the presence of any temptation small or great—a defenseless man.

Geoffrey returned to the cottage. The servant stopped him in the passage, to ask at what time he wished to dine. Instead of answering, he inquired angrily for Mrs. Dethridge. Mrs. Dethridge had not come back.

It was now late in the afternoon, and she had been out since the early morning. This had never happened before. Vague suspicions of her, one more monstrous than another, began to rise in Geoffrey's mind. Between the drink and the fever, he had been (as Julius had told him) wandering in his mind during a part of the night. Had he let anything out in that condition? Had Hester heard it? And was it, by any chance, at the bottom of her long absence and her notice to quit? He determined—without letting her see that he suspected her—to clear up that doubt as soon as his landlady returned to the house.

The evening came. It was past nine o'clock before there was a ring at the bell. The servant came to ask for the key. Geoffrey rose to go to the gate himself—and changed his mind before he left the room. *Her* suspicions might be roused (supposing it to be Hester who was waiting for admission) if he opened the gate to her when the servant was there to do it. He gave the girl the key, and kept out of sight.

* * * * *

“Dead tired!”—the servant said to herself, seeing her mistress by the light of the lamp over the gate.

“Dead tired!”—Geoffrey said to himself, ob-

serving Hester suspiciously as she passed him in the passage on her way upstairs to take off her bonnet in her own room.

“Dead tired!”—Anne said to herself, meeting Hester on the upper floor, and receiving from her a letter in Blanche’s handwriting, delivered to the mistress of the cottage by the postman, who had met her at her own gate.

* * * * *

Having given the letter to Anne, Hester Dethridge withdrew to her bedroom.

Geoffrey closed the door of the drawing-room, in which the candles were burning, and went into the dining-room, in which there was no light. Leaving the door ajar, he waited to intercept his landlady on her way back to her supper in the kitchen.

Hester wearily secured her door, wearily lighted the candles, wearily put the pen and ink on the table. For some minutes after this she was compelled to sit down, and rally her strength and fetch her breath. After a little she was able to remove her upper clothing. This done, she took the manuscript, inscribed, “My Confession,” out of the secret pocket of her stays—turned to the last leaf as before—and wrote another entry, under the entry made on the previous night.

“This morning I gave him notice to quit, and offered him his money back if he wanted it. He refuses to go. He shall go to-morrow, or I will burn the place over his head. All through to-day I have avoided him by keeping out of the

house. No rest to ease my mind, and no sleep to close my eyes. I humbly bear my cross as long as my strength will let me.”

At those words the pen dropped from her fingers. Her head nodded on her breast. She roused herself with a start. Sleep was the enemy she dreaded: sleep brought dreams.

She unfastened the window-shutters and looked out at the night. The peaceful moonlight was shining over the garden. The clear depths of the night sky were soothing and beautiful to look at. What! Fading already? clouds? darkness? No! Nearly asleep once more. She roused herself again, with a start. There was the moonlight, and there was the garden as bright under it as ever.

Dreams or no dreams, it was useless to fight longer against the weariness that overpowered her. She closed the shutters, and went back to the bed; and put her Confession in its customary place at night, under her pillow.

She looked round the room—and shuddered. Every corner of it was filled with the terrible memories of the past night. She might wake from the torture of the dreams to find the terror of the Apparition watching at her bedside. Was there no remedy? no blessed safeguard under which she might tranquilly resign herself to sleep? A thought crossed her mind. The good book—the Bible. If she slept with the Bible under her pillow, there was hope in the good book—the hope of sleeping in peace.

It was not worth while to put on the gown and

the stays which she had taken off. Her shawl would cover her. It was equally needless to take the candle. The lower shutters would not be closed at that hour; and if they were, she could lay her hand on the Bible, in its place on the parlor book-shelf, in the dark.

She removed the Confession from under the pillow. Not even for a minute could she prevail on herself to leave it in one room while she was away from it in another. With the manuscript folded up, and hidden in her hand, she slowly descended the stairs again. Her knees trembled under her. She was obliged to hold by the banisters with the hand that was free.

Geoffrey observed her from the dining-room, on her way down the stairs. He waited to see what she did, before he showed himself, and spoke to her. Instead of going on into the kitchen, she stopped short and entered the parlor. Another suspicious circumstance! What did she want in the parlor, without a candle, at that time of night?

She went to the book-case—her dark figure plainly visible in the moonlight that flooded the little room. She staggered and put her hand to her head; giddy, to all appearance, from extreme fatigue. She recovered herself, and took a book from the shelf. She leaned against the wall after she had possessed herself of the book—too weary, as it seemed, to get upstairs again without a little rest. Her arm-chair was near her. Better rest, for a moment or two, to be had in that than could be got by leaning against the wall. She

sat down heavily in the chair, with the book on her lap. One of her arms hung over the arm of the chair, with the hand closed, apparently holding something.

Her head nodded on her breast—recovered itself—and sank gently on the cushion at the back of the chair. Asleep? Fast asleep.

In less than a minute the muscles of the closed hand that hung over the arm of the chair slowly relaxed. Something white slipped out of her hand, and lay in the moonlight on the floor.

Geoffrey took off his heavy shoes, and entered the room noiselessly in his stockings. He picked up the white thing on the floor. It proved to be a collection of several sheets of thin paper, neatly folded together, and closely covered with writing.

Writing? As long as she was awake she had kept it hidden in her hand. Why hide it?

Had he let out anything to compromise himself when he was light-headed with the fever the night before? and had she taken it down in writing to produce against him? Possessed by guilty distrust, even that monstrous doubt assumed a look of probability to Geoffrey's mind. He left the parlor as noiselessly as he had entered it, and made for the candle-light in the drawing-room, determined to examine the manuscript in his hand.

After carefully smoothing out the folded leaves on the table, he turned to the first page, and read these lines.

CHAPTER THE FIFTY-FOURTH.

THE MANUSCRIPT.

1.

“MY Confession: To be put into my coffin; and to be buried with me when I die.

“This is the history of what I did in the time of my married life. Here—known to no other mortal creature, confessed to my Creator alone—is the truth.

“At the great day of the Resurrection, we shall all rise again in our bodies as we have lived. When I am called before the Judgment Seat I shall have this in my hand.

“Oh, just and merciful Judge, Thou knowest what I have suffered. My trust is in Thee.

2.

“I am the eldest of a large family, born of pious parents. We belonged to the congregation of the Primitive Methodists.

“My sisters were all married before me. I remained for some years the only one at home. At the latter part of the time my mother’s health failed; and I managed the house in her place. Our spiritual pastor, good Mr. Bapchild, used often to dine with us, on Sundays, between the services. He approved of my management of the house, and, in particular, of my cooking. This was not pleasant to my mother, who felt a

jealousy of my being, as it were, set over her in her place. My unhappiness at home began in this way. My mother's temper got worse as her health got worse. My father was much away from us, traveling for his business. I had to bear it all. About this time I began to think it would be well for me if I could marry as my sisters had done; and have good Mr. Bapchild to dinner, between the services, in a house of my own.

“In this frame of mind, I made acquaintance with a young man who attended service at our chapel.

“His name was Joel Dethridge. He had a beautiful voice. When we sang hymns, he sang off the same book with me. By trade he was a paper-hanger. We had much serious talk together. I walked with him on Sundays. He was a good ten years younger than I was; and, being only a journeyman, his worldly station was below mine. My mother found out the liking that had grown up between us. She told my father the next time he was at home. Also my married sisters and my brothers. They all joined together to stop things from going further between me and Joel Dethridge. I had a hard time of it. Mr. Bapchild expressed himself as feeling much grieved at the turn things were taking. He introduced me into a sermon—not by name, but I knew who it was meant for. Perhaps I might have given way if they had not done one thing. They made inquiries of my young man's enemies, and brought wicked stories

of him to me behind his back. This, after we had sung off the same hymn-book, and walked together, and agreed one with the other on religious subjects, was too much to bear. I was of age to judge for myself. And I married Joel Dethridge.

3.

“My relations all turned their backs on me. Not one of them was present at my marriage; my brother Reuben, in particular, who led the rest, saying that they had done with me from that time forth. Mr. Bapchild was much moved; he shed tears, and said he would pray for me.

“I was married in London by a pastor who was a stranger; and we settled in London with fair prospects. I had a little fortune of my own—my share of some money left to us girls by our aunt Hester, whom I was named after. It was three hundred pounds. Nearly one hundred of this I spent in buying furniture to fit up the little house we took to live in. The rest I gave to my husband to put into the bank against the time when he wanted it to set up in business for himself.

“For three months, more or less, we got on nicely—except in one particular. My husband never stirred in the matter of starting in business for himself.

“He was once or twice cross with me when I said it seemed a pity to be spending the money in the bank (which might be afterward wanted) instead of earning more in business. Good Mr.

Bapchild, happening about this time to be in London, stayed over Sunday, and came to dine with us between the services. He had tried to make my peace with my relations—but he had not succeeded. At my request he spoke to my husband about the necessity of exerting himself. My husband took it ill. I then saw him seriously out of temper for the first time. Good Mr. Bapchild said no more. He appeared to be alarmed at what had happened, and he took his leave early.

“Shortly afterward my husband went out. I got tea ready for him—but he never came back. I got supper ready for him—but he never came back. It was past twelve at night before I saw him again. I was very much startled by the state he came home in. He didn’t speak like himself, or look like himself: he didn’t seem to know me—wandered in his mind, and fell all in a lump like on our bed. I ran out and fetched the doctor to him.

“The doctor pulled him up to the light, and looked at him; smelled his breath, and dropped him down again on the bed; turned about, and stared at me. ‘What’s the matter, sir?’ I says. ‘Do you mean to tell me you don’t know?’ says the doctor. ‘No, sir,’ says I. ‘Why what sort of a woman are you,’ says he, ‘not to know a drunken man when you see him!’ With that he went away, and left me standing by the bedside, all in a tremble from head to foot.

“This was how I first found out that I was the wife of a drunken man.

4.

“I have omitted to say anything about my husband’s family.

“While we were keeping company together he told me he was an orphan—with an uncle and aunt in Canada, and an only brother settled in Scotland. Before we were married he gave me a letter from this brother. It was to say that he was sorry he was not able to come to England, and be present at my marriage, and to wish me joy and the rest of it. Good Mr. Bapchild (to whom, in my distress, I wrote word privately of what had happened) wrote back in return, telling me to wait a little, and see whether my husband did it again.

“I had not long to wait. He was in liquor again the next day, and the next. Hearing this, Mr. Bapchild instructed me to send him the letter from my husband’s brother. He reminded me of some of the stories about my husband, which I had refused to believe in the time before I was married; and he said it might be well to make inquiries.

“The end of the inquiries was this: The brother, at that very time, was placed privately (by his own request) under a doctor’s care to get broken of habits of drinking. The craving for strong liquor (the doctor wrote) was in the family. They would be sober sometimes for months together, drinking nothing stronger than tea. Then the fit would seize them; and they would drink, drink, drink, for days together, like the mad and miserable wretches that they were.

“This was the husband I was married to. And I had offended all my relations, and estranged them from me, for his sake. Here was surely a sad prospect for a woman after only a few months of wedded life!

“In a year’s time the money in the bank was gone, and my husband was out of employment. He always got work—being a first-rate hand when he was sober—and always lost it again when the drinking-fit seized him. I was loath to leave our nice little house, and part with my pretty furniture; and I proposed to him to let me try for employment, by the day, as cook, and so keep things going while he was looking out again for work. He was sober and penitent at the time; and he agreed to what I proposed. And, more than that, he took the Total Abstinence Pledge, and promised to turn over a new leaf. Matters, as I thought, began to look fairly again. We had nobody but our two selves to think of. I had borne no child, and had no prospect of bearing one. Unlike most women, I thought this a mercy instead of a misfortune. In my situation (as I soon grew to know) my becoming a mother would only have proved to be an aggravation of my hard lot.

“The sort of employment I wanted was not to be got in a day. Good Mr. Bapchild gave me a character; and our landlord, a worthy man (belonging, I am sorry to say, to the Popish Church), spoke for me to the steward of a club. Still, it took time to persuade people that I was the thorough good cook I claimed to be. Nigh on a

fortnight had passed before I got the chance I had been looking out for. I went home in good spirits (for me) to report what had happened, and found the brokers in the house carrying off the furniture which I had bought with my own money for sale by auction. I asked them how they dared touch it without my leave. They answered, civilly enough I must own, that they were acting under my husband's orders; and they went on removing it, before my own eyes, to the cart outside. I ran upstairs, and found my husband on the landing. He was in liquor again. It is useless to say what passed between us. I shall only mention that this was the first occasion on which he lifted his fist and struck me.

5.

“Having a spirit of my own, I was resolved not to endure it. I ran out to the Police Court, hard by.

“My money had not only bought the furniture—it had kept the house going as well; paying the taxes which the Queen and the Parliament asked for among other things. I now went to the magistrate to see what the Queen and the Parliament, in return for the taxes, would do for *me*.

“‘Is your furniture settled on yourself?’ he says, when I told him what had happened.

“I didn't understand what he meant. He turned to some person who was sitting on the bench with him. ‘This is a hard case,’ he says.

‘Poor people in this condition of life don’t even know what a marriage settlement means. And, if they did, how many of them could afford to pay the lawyer’s charges?’ Upon that he turned to me. ‘Yours is a common case,’ he said. ‘In the present state of the law I can do nothing for you.’

“It was impossible to believe that. Common or not, I put my case to him over again.

“‘I have bought the furniture with my own money, sir,’ I says. ‘It’s mine, honestly come by, with bill and receipt to prove it. They are taking it away from me by force, to sell it against my will. Don’t tell me that’s the law. This a Christian country. It can’t be.’

“‘My good creature,’ says he, ‘you are a married woman. The law doesn’t allow a married woman to call anything her own—unless she has previously (with a lawyer’s help) made a bargain to that effect with her husband before marrying him. You have made no bargain. Your husband has a right to sell your furniture if he likes. I am sorry for you; I can’t hinder him.’

“I was obstinate about it. ‘Please to answer me this, sir,’ I says. ‘I’ve been told by wiser heads than mine that we all pay our taxes to keep the Queen and the Parliament going, and that the Queen and the Parliament make laws to protect us in return. I have paid my taxes. Why, if you please, is there no law to protect me in return?’

“‘I can’t enter into that,’ says he. ‘I must take the law as I find it; and so must you. I

see a mark there on the side of your face. Has your husband been beating you? If he has, summon him here. I can punish him for *that*.'

" 'How can you punish him, sir?' says I.

" 'I can fine him,' says he. 'Or I can send him to prison.'

" 'As to the fine,' says I, 'he can pay that out of the money he gets by selling my furniture. As to the prison, while he's in it, what's to become of me, with my money spent by him, and my possession gone; and when he's *out* of it, what's to become of me again, with a husband whom I have been the means of punishing, and who comes home to his wife knowing it? It's bad enough as it is, sir,' says I. 'There's more that's bruised in me than what shows in my face. I wish you good-morning.'

6.

"When I got back the furniture was gone and my husband was gone. There was nobody but the landlord in the empty house. He said all that could be said—kindly enough toward me, so far as I was concerned. When he was gone I locked my trunk, and got away in a cab after dark, and found a lodging to lay my head in. If ever there was a lonely, broken-hearted creature in the world, I was that creature that night.

"There was but one chance of earning my bread—to go to the employment offered me (under a man cook, at a club). And there was but one hope—the hope that I had lost sight of my husband forever.

“I went to my work—and prospered in it—and earned my first quarter’s wages. But it’s not good for a woman to be situated as I was; friendless and alone, with her things that she took a pride in sold away from her, and with nothing to look forward to in her life to come. I was regular in my attendance at chapel; but I think my heart began to get hardened, and my mind to be overcast in secret with its own thoughts about this time. There was a change coming. Two or three days after I had earned the wages just mentioned my husband found me out. The furniture money was all spent. He made a disturbance at the club. I was only able to quiet him by giving him all the money I could spare from my own necessities. The scandal was brought before the committee. They said, if the circumstance occurred again, they should be obliged to part with me. In a fortnight the circumstance occurred again. It’s useless to dwell on it. They all said they were sorry for me. I lost the place. My husband went back with me to my lodgings. The next morning I caught him taking my purse, with the few shillings I had in it, out of my trunk, which he had broken open. We quarreled. And he struck me again—this time knocking me down.

“I went once more to the police court, and told my story—to another magistrate this time. My only petition was to have my husband kept away from me. ‘I don’t want to be a burden on others’ (I says); ‘I don’t want to do anything but what’s right. I don’t even complain of hav-

ing been cruelly used. All I ask is to be let to earn an honest living. Will the law protect me in the effort to do that?

“The answer, in substance, was that the law might protect me, provided I had money to spend in asking some higher court to grant me a separation. After allowing my husband to rob me openly of the only property I possessed—namely, my furniture—the law turned round on me when I called upon it in my distress, and held out its hand to be paid. I had just three-and-sixpence left in the world—and the prospect, if I earned more, of my husband coming (with permission of the law) and taking it away from me. There was only one chance—namely, to get time to turn round in, and to escape him again. I got a month’s freedom from him, by charging him with knocking me down. The magistrate (happening to be young, and new to his business) sent him to prison, instead of fining him. This gave me time to get a character from the club, as well as a special testimonial from good Mr. Bapchild. With the help of these, I obtained a place in a private family—a place in the country, this time.

“I found myself now in a haven of peace. I was among worthy, kind-hearted people, who felt for my distresses, and treated me most indulgently. Indeed, through all my troubles, I must say I have found one thing hold good. In my experience, I have observed that people are oftener quick than not to feel a human compassion for others in distress; also, that they mostly

see plain enough what's hard and cruel and unfair on them in the governing of the country which they help to keep going. But once ask them to get on from sitting down and grumbling about it, to rising up and setting it right, and what do you find them? As helpless as a flock of sheep—that's what you find them.

“More than six months passed, and I saved a little money again.

“One night, just as we were going to bed, there was a loud ring at the bell. The footman answered the door, and I heard my husband's voice in the hall. He had traced me, with the help of a man he knew in the police; and he had come to claim his rights. I offered him all the little money I had to let me be. My good master spoke to him. It was all useless. He was obstinate and savage. If—instead of my running off from him—it had been all the other way, and he had run off from me, something might have been done (as I understood) to protect me. But he stuck to his wife—as long as I could make a farthing, he stuck to his wife. Being married to him, I had no right to have left him; I was bound to go with my husband; there was no escape for me. I bade them good-by. And I have never forgotten their kindness to me from that day to this.

“My husband took me back to London.

“As long as the money lasted, the drinking went on. When it was gone I was beaten again. Where was the remedy? There was no remedy, but to try and escape him once more.

Why didn't I have him locked up? What was the good of having him locked up? In a few weeks he would be out of prison; sober and penitent, and promising amendment—and then when the fit took him; there he would be, the same furious savage that he had been often and often before. My heart got hard under the hopelessness of it; and dark thoughts beset me, mostly at night. About this time I began to say to myself, 'There's no deliverance from this but in death—his death or mine.'

"Once or twice I went down to the bridges after dark, and looked over at the river. No. I wasn't the sort of woman who ends her own wretchedness in that way. Your blood must be in a fever, and your head in a flame—at least I fancy so—you must be hurried into it, like, to go and make away with yourself. My troubles never took that effect on me. I always turned cold under them, instead of hot. Bad for me, I dare say; but what you are—you are. Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?

"I got away from him once more, and found good employment once more. It don't matter how, and it don't matter where. My story is always the same thing, over and over again. Best get to the end.

"There was one change, however, this time. My employment was not in a private family. I was also allowed to teach cookery to young women, in my leisure hours. What with this, and what with a longer time passing on the present

occasion before my husband found me out, I was as comfortably off as in my position I could hope to be. When my work was done, I went away at night to sleep in a lodging of my own. It was only a bedroom; and I furnished it myself—partly for the sake of economy (the rent being not half as much as for a furnished room); and partly for the sake of cleanliness. Through all my troubles I always liked things neat about me—neat and shapely and good.

“Well, it’s needless to say how it ended. He found me out again—this time by a chance meeting with me in the street.

“He was in rags, and half starved. But that didn’t matter now. All he had to do was to put his hand into my pocket and take what he wanted. There is no limit, in England, to what a bad husband may do—as long as he sticks to his wife. On the present occasion, he was cunning enough to see that he would be the loser if he disturbed me in my employment. For a while things went on as smoothly as they could. I made a pretense that the work was harder than usual; and I got leave (loathing the sight of him, I honestly own) to sleep at the place where I was employed. This was not for long. The fit took him again, in due course; and he came and made a disturbance. As before, this was not to be borne by decent people. As before, they were sorry to part with me. As before, I lost my place.

“Another woman would have gone mad

under it. I fancy it just missed, by a hairbreadth, maddening Me.

“When I looked at him that night, deep in his drunken sleep, I thought of Jael and Sisera (see the Book of Judges; chapter 4th; verses 17 to 21). It says, she ‘took a nail of the tent, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.’ She did this deed to deliver her nation from Sisera. If there had been a hammer and a nail in the room that night, I think I should have been Jael—with this difference, that I should have done it to deliver myself.

“With the morning this passed off, for the time. I went and spoke to a lawyer.

“Most people, in my place, would have had enough of the law already. But I was one of the sort who drain the cup to the dregs. What I said to him was, in substance, this: ‘I come to ask your advice about a madman. Mad people, as I understand it, are people who have lost control over their own minds. Sometimes this leads them to entertaining delusions; and sometimes it leads them to committing actions hurtful to others or to themselves. My husband has lost all control over his own craving for strong drink. He requires to be kept from liquor, as other madmen require to be kept from attempting their own lives, or the lives of those about them. It’s a frenzy beyond his own control, with *him*—just as it’s a frenzy beyond their own control, with

them. There are Asylums for mad people, all over the country, at the public disposal, on certain conditions. If I fulfill those conditions, will the law deliver me from the misery of being married to a madman, whose madness is drink?'—'No,' says the lawyer. 'The law of England declines to consider an incurable drunkard as a fit object for restraint; the law of England leaves the husbands and wives of such people in a perfectly helpless situation, to deal with their own misery as they best can.'

"I made my acknowledgments to the gentleman and left him. The last chance was this chance—and this had failed me.

8.

"The thought that had once found its way into my mind already, now found its way back again; and never altogether left me from that time forth. No deliverance for me but in death—his death, or mine.

"I had it before me night and day; in chapel and out of chapel just the same. I read the story of Jael and Sisera so often that the Bible got to open of itself at that place.

"The laws of my country, which ought to have protected me as an honest woman, left me helpless. In place of the laws I had no friend near to open my heart to. I was shut up in myself. And I was married to that man. Consider me as a human creature, and say, Was this not trying my humanity very hardly?

“I wrote to good Mr. Bapchild. Not going into particulars; only telling him I was beset by temptation, and begging him to come and help me. He was confined to his bed by illness; he could only write me a letter of good advice. To profit by good advice, people must have a glimpse of happiness to look forward to as a reward for exerting themselves. Religion itself is obliged to hold out a reward, and to say to us poor mortals, Be good, and you shall go to heaven. I had no glimpse of happiness. I was thankful (in a dull sort of way) to good Mr. Bapchild—and there it ended.

“The time had been when a word from my old pastor would have put me in the right way again. I began to feel scared by myself. If the next ill usage I received from Joel Dethridge found me an unchanged woman, it was borne in strongly on my mind that I should be as likely as not to get my deliverance from him by my own hand.

“Goaded to it, by the fear of this, I humbled myself before my relations for the first time. I wrote to beg their pardon; to own that they had proved to be right in their opinion of my husband; and to entreat them to be friends with me again, so far as to let me visit them from time to time. My notion was, that it might soften my heart if I could see the old place, and talk the old talk, and look again at the well-remembered faces. I am almost ashamed to own it—but, if I had had anything to give, I would have parted with it all, to be allowed to go back into

mother's kitchen and cook the Sunday dinner for them once more.

“But this was not to be. Not long before my letter was received mother had died. They laid it all at my door. She had been ailing for years past, and the doctors had said it was hopeless from the first—but they laid it all at my door. One of my sisters wrote to say that much, in as few words as could possibly suffice for saying it. My father never answered my letter at all.

9.

“Magistrates and lawyers; relations and friends; endurance of injuries, patience, hope and honest work—I had tried all these, and tried them vainly. Look round me where I might, the prospect was closed on all sides.

“At this time my husband had got a little work to do. He came home out of temper one night, and I gave him a warning. ‘Don't try me too far, Joel, for your own sake,’ was all I said. It was one of his sober days; and for the first time a word from me seemed to have an effect on him. He looked hard at me for a minute or so. And then he went and sat down in a corner, and held his peace.

“This was on a Tuesday in the week. On the Saturday he got paid, and the drinking fit took him again.

“On Friday in the next week I happened to come back late—having had a good stroke of work to do that day, in the way of cooking a public dinner for a tavern-keeper who knew me.

I found my husband gone, and the bedroom stripped of the furniture which I had put into it. For the second time he had robbed me of my own property, and had turned it into money to be spent in drink.

“I didn’t say a word. I stood and looked round the empty room. What was going on in me I hardly knew myself at the time, and can’t describe now. All I remember is, that after a little, I turned about to leave the house. I knew the places where my husband was likely to be found; and the devil possessed me to go and find him. The landlady came out into the passage and tried to stop me. She was a bigger and a stronger woman than I was. But I shook her off like a child. Thinking over it now, I believe she was in no condition to put out her strength. The sight of me frightened her.

“I found him. I said—well, I said what a woman beside herself with fury would be likely to say. It’s needless to tell how it ended. He knocked me down.

“After that, there is a spot of darkness like in my memory. The next thing I can call to mind, is coming back to my senses after some days. Three of my teeth were knocked out—but that was not the worst of it. My head had struck against something in falling, and some part of me (a nerve, I think they said) was injured in such a way as to affect my speech. I don’t mean that I was downright dumb—I only mean that, all of a sudden, it had become a labor to me to speak. A long word was as serious an

obstacle as if I was a child again. They took me to the hospital. When the medical gentlemen heard what it was, the medical gentlemen came crowding round me. I appeared to lay hold of their interest, just as a story-book lays hold of the interest of other people. The upshot of it was, that I might end in being dumb, or I might get my speech again—the chances were about equal. Only two things were needful. One of them was, that I should live on good nourishing diet. The other was, that I should keep my mind easy.

“About the diet it was not possible to decide. My getting good nourishing food and drink depended on my getting money to buy the same. As to my mind, there was no difficulty about *that*. If my husband came back to me, my mind was made up to kill him.

“Horrid—I am well aware this is horrid. Nobody else, in my place, would have ended as wickedly as that. All the other women in the world, tried as I was, would have risen superior to the trial.

10.

“I have said that people (excepting my husband and my relations) were almost always good to me.

“The landlord of the house which we had taken when we were married heard of my sad case. He gave me one of his empty houses to look after, and a little weekly allowance for doing it. Some of the furniture in the upper rooms,

not being wanted by the last tenant, was left to be taken at a valuation if the next tenant needed it. Two of the servants' bedrooms (in the attics), one next to the other, had all that was wanted in them. So I had a roof to cover me, and a choice of beds to lie on, and money to get me food. All well again—but all too late. If that house could speak, what tales that house would have to tell of me!

“I have been told by the doctors to exercise my speech. Being all alone, with nobody to speak to, except when the landlord dropped in, or when the servant next door said, ‘Nice day, ain’t it?’ or, ‘Don’t you feel lonely?’ or such like, I bought the newspaper, and read it out loud to myself to exercise my speech in that way. One day I came upon a bit about the wives of drunken husbands. It was a report of something said on that subject by a London coroner, who had held inquests on dead husbands (in the lower ranks of life), and who had his reasons for suspecting the wives. Examination of the body (he said) didn’t prove it; and witnesses didn’t prove it; but he thought it, nevertheless, quite possible, in some cases, that, when the woman could bear it no longer, she sometimes took a damp towel, and waited till the husband (drugged with his own liquor) was sunk in his sleep, and then put the towel over his nose and mouth, and ended it that way without anybody being the wiser. I laid down the newspaper and fell into thinking. My mind was, by this time, in a prophetic way. I said to myself, ‘I haven’t hap-

pened on this for nothing: this means that I shall see my husband again.'

"It was then just after my dinner-time—two o'clock. The same night, at the moment when I had put out my candle and laid me down in bed, I heard a knock at the street door. Before I had lighted my candle I says to myself, 'Here he is.'

"I huddled on a few things, and struck a light, and went downstairs. I called out through the door, 'Who's there?' And his voice answered, 'Let me in.'

"I sat down on a chair in the passage, and shook all over like a person struck with palsy. Not from the fear of him—but from my mind being in the prophetic way. I knew I was going to be driven to it at last. Try as I might to keep from doing it, my mind told me I was to do it now. I sat shaking on the chair in the passage; I on one side of the door, and he on the other.

"He knocked again, and again, and again. I knew it was useless to try—and yet I resolved to try. I determined not to let him in till I was forced to it. I determined to let him alarm the neighborhood, and to see if the neighborhood would step between us. I went upstairs and waited at the open staircase window over the door.

"The policeman came up, and the neighbors came out. They were all for giving him into custody. The policeman laid hands on him. He had but one word to say; he had only to point

up to me at the window, and to tell them I was his wife. The neighbors went indoors again. The policeman dropped hold of his arm. It was I who was in the wrong, and not he. I was bound to let my husband in. I went downstairs again, and let him in.

“Nothing passed between us that night. I threw open the door of the bedroom next to mine, and went and locked myself into my own room. He was dead beat with roaming the streets, without a penny in his pocket, all day long. The bed to lie on was all he wanted for that night.

“The next morning I tried again—tried to turn back on the way that I was doomed to go; knowing beforehand that it would be of no use. I offered him three parts of my poor weekly earnings, to be paid to him regularly at the landlord’s office, if he would only keep away from me and from the house. He laughed in my face. As my husband, he could take all my earnings if he chose. And as for leaving the house, the house offered him free quarters to live in as long as I was employed to look after it. The landlord couldn’t part man and wife.

“I said no more. Later in the day the landlord came. He said if we could make it out to live together peaceably he had neither the right nor the wish to interfere. If we made any disturbances, then he should be obliged to provide himself with some other woman to look after the house. I had nowhere else to go, and no other employment to undertake. If, in spite of that, I had put on my bonnet and walked out, my

husband would have walked out after me. And all decent people would have patted him on the back, and said, 'Quite right, good man—quite right.'

"So there he was by his own act, and with the approval of others, in the same house with me.

"I made no remark to him or to the landlord. Nothing roused me now. I knew what was coming; I waited for the end. There was some change visible in me to others, as I suppose, though not noticeable by myself, which first surprised my husband and then daunted him. When the next night came, I heard him lock the door softly in his own room. It didn't matter to me. When the time was ripe, ten thousand locks wouldn't lock out what was to come.

"The next day bringing my weekly payment, brought me a step nearer on the way to the end. Getting the money, he could get the drink. This time he began cunningly—in other words, he began his drinking by slow degrees. The landlord (bent, honest man, on trying to keep the peace between us) had given him some odd jobs to do, in the way of small repairs, here and there about the house. 'You owe this,' he says, 'to my desire to do a good turn to your poor wife. I am helping you for her sake. Show yourself worthy to be helped, if you can.'

"He said, as usual, that he was going to turn over a new leaf. Too late! The time had gone by. He was doomed, and I was doomed. It didn't matter what he said now. It didn't mat-

ter when he locked his door again the last thing at night.

“The next day was Sunday. Nothing happened. I went to chapel. Mere habit. It did me no good. He got on a little with the drinking—but still cunningly, by slow degrees. I knew by experience that this meant a long fit, and a bad one, to come.

“Monday, there were the odd jobs about the house to be begun. He was by this time just sober enough to do his work, and just tipsy enough to take a spiteful pleasure in persecuting his wife. He went out and got the things he wanted, and came back and called for me. A skilled workman like he was (he said) wanted a journeyman under him. There were things which it was beneath a skilled workman to do for himself. He was not going to call in a man or a boy, and then have to pay them. He was going to get it done for nothing, and he meant to make a journeyman of *me*. Half tipsy and half sober, he went on talking like that, and laying out his things, all quite right, as he wanted them. When they were ready he straightened himself up, and he gave me his orders what I was to do.

“I obeyed him to the best of my ability. Whatever he said, and whatever he did, I knew he was going as straight as man could go to his own death by my hands.

“The rats and mice were all over the house, and the place generally was out of repair. He ought to have begun on the kitchen-floor; but

(having sentence pronounced against him) he began in the empty parlors on the ground-floor.

“These parlors were separated by what is called a ‘lath-and-plaster wall.’ The rats had damaged it. At one part they had gnawed through and spoiled the paper; at another part they had not got so far. The landlord’s orders were to spare the paper, because he had some by him to match it. My husband began at a place where the paper was whole. Under his directions I mixed up—I won’t say what. With the help of it he got the paper loose from the wall, without injuring it in any way, in a long, hanging strip. Under it was the plaster and the laths, gnawed away in places by the rats. Though strictly a paper-hanger by trade, he could be plasterer too when he liked. I saw how he cut away the rotten laths and ripped off the plaster; and (under his directions again) I mixed up the new plaster he wanted, and handed him the new laths, and saw how he set them. I won’t say a word about how this was done either.

“I have a reason for keeping silence here, which is, to my mind, a very dreadful one. In everything that my husband made me do that day he was showing me (blindfold) the way to kill him, so that no living soul, in the police or out of it, could suspect me of the deed.

“We finished the job on the wall just before dark. I went to my cup of tea, and he went to his bottle of gin.

“I left him, drinking hard, to put our two bedrooms tidy for the night. The place that his

bed happened to be set in (which I had never remarked particularly before) seemed, in a manner of speaking, to force itself on my notice now.

“The head of the bedstead was set against the wall which divided his room from mine. From looking at the bedstead I got to looking at the wall next. Then to wondering what it was made of. Then to rapping against it with my knuckles. The sound told me there was nothing but lath and plaster under the paper. It was the same as the wall we had been at work on down stairs. We had cleared our way so far through this last—in certain places where the repairs were most needed—that we had to be careful not to burst through the paper in the room on the other side. I found myself calling to mind the caution my husband had given me while we were at this part of the work, word for word as he had spoken it. *‘Take care you don’t find your hands in the next room.’* That was what he had said down in the parlor. Up in his bedroom I kept on repeating it in my own mind—with my eyes all the while on the key, which he had moved to the inner side of the door to lock himself in—till the knowledge of what it meant burst on me like a flash of light. I looked at the wall, at the bed-head, at my own two hands—and I shivered as if it was winter-time.

“Hours must have passed like minutes while I was upstairs that night. I lost all count of time. When my husband came up from his drinking, he found me in his room.

“I leave the rest untold, and pass on purposely to the next morning.

“No mortal eyes but mine will ever see these lines. Still, there are things a woman can't write of even to herself. I shall only say this. I suffered the last and worst of many indignities at my husband's hands—at the very time when I first saw, set plainly before me, the way to take his life. He went out toward noon next day, to go his rounds among the public houses; my mind being then strung up to deliver myself from him, for good and all, when he came back at night.

“The things we had used on the previous day were left in the parlor. I was all by myself in the house, free to put in practice the lesson he had taught me. I proved myself an apt scholar. Before the lamps were lighted in the street I had my own way prepared (in my bedroom and in his) for laying my own hands on him—after he had locked himself up for the night.

“I don't remember feeling either fear or doubt through all those hours. I sat down to my bit of supper with no better and no worse an appetite than usual. The only change in me that I can call to mind was that I felt a singular longing to have somebody with me to keep me company. Having no friend to ask in, I went to the street door and stood looking at the people passing this way and that.

“A stray dog, sniffing about, came up to me. Generally I dislike dogs and beasts of all kinds.

I called this one in and gave him his supper. He had been taught (I suppose) to sit up on his hind-legs and beg for food; at any rate, that was his way of asking me for more. I laughed—it seems impossible when I look back at it now, but for all that it's true—I laughed till the tears ran down my cheeks, at the little beast on his haunches, with his ears pricked up and his head on one side and his mouth watering for the victuals. I wonder whether I was in my right senses? I don't know.

“When the dog had got all he could get, he whined to be let out to roam the streets again.

“As I opened the door to let the creature go his ways, I saw my husband crossing the road to come in. ‘Keep out’ (I says to him); ‘to-night, of all nights, keep out.’ He was too drunk to heed me; he passed by, and blundered his way upstairs. I followed and listened. I heard him open his door, and bang it to, and lock it. I waited a bit, and went up another stair or two. I heard him drop down on to his bed. In a minute more he was fast asleep and snoring.

“It had all happened as it was wanted to happen. In two minutes—without doing one single thing to bring suspicion on myself—I could have smothered him. I went into my own room. I took up the towel that I had laid ready. I was within an inch of it—when there came a rush of something up into my head. I can't say what it was. I can only say the horrors laid hold of me and hunted me then and there out of the house.

“I put on my bonnet, and slipped the key of the street door into my pocket. It was only half-past nine—or may be a quarter to ten. If I had any one clear notion in my head, it was the notion of running away, and never allowing myself to set eyes on the house or the husband more.

“I went up the street—and came back. I went down the street—and came back. I tried it a third time, and went round and round and round—and came back. It was not to be done. The house held me chained to it like a dog to his kennel. I couldn’t keep away from it. For the life of me, I couldn’t keep away from it.

“A company of gay young men and women passed me, just as I was going to let myself in again. They were in a great hurry. ‘Step out,’ says one of the men; ‘the theater’s close by, and we shall be just in time for the farce.’ I turned about and followed them. Having been piously brought up, I had never been inside a theater in my life. It struck me that I might get taken, as it were, out of myself, if I saw something that was quite strange to me, and heard something which would put new thoughts into my mind.

“They went in to the pit, and I went in after them.

“The thing they called the farce had begun. Men and women came on to the stage, turn and turn about, and talked, and went off again. Before long all the people about me in the pit were laughing and clapping their hands. The noise

they made angered me. I don't know how to describe the state I was in. My eyes wouldn't serve me, and my ears wouldn't serve me, to see and to hear what the rest of them were seeing and hearing. There must have been something, I fancy, in my mind that got itself between me and what was going on upon the stage. The play looked fair enough on the surface; but there was danger and death at the bottom of it. The players were talking and laughing to deceive the people—with murder in their minds all the time. And nobody knew it but me—and my tongue was tied when I tried to tell the others. I got up, and ran out. The moment I was in the street my steps turned back of themselves on the way to the house. I called a cab, and told the man to drive (as far as a shilling would take me) the opposite way. He put me down—I don't know where. Across the street I saw an inscription in letters of flame over an open door. The man said it was a dancing-place. Dancing was as new to me as play-going. I had one more shilling left; and I paid to go in, and see what a sight of the dancing would do for me. The light from the ceiling poured down in this place as if it was all on fire. The crashing of the music was dreadful. The whirling round and round of men and women in each other's arms was quite maddening to see. I don't know what happened to me here. The great blaze of light from the ceiling turned blood-red on a sudden. The man standing in front of the musicians waving a stick took the likeness of Satan, as seen in the

picture in our family Bible at home. The whirling men and women went round and round, with white faces like the faces of the dead, and bodies robed in winding-sheets. I screamed out with the terror of it; and some person took me by the arm and put me outside the door. The darkness did me good: it was comforting and delicious—like a cool hand laid on a hot head. I went walking on through it, without knowing where; composing my mind with the belief that I had lost my way, and that I should find myself miles distant from home when morning dawned. After some time I got too weary to go on, and I sat me down to rest on a door-step. I dozed a bit, and woke up. When I got on my feet to go on again, I happened to turn my head toward the door of the house. The number on it was the same number as ours. I looked again. And behold, it was our steps I had been resting on. The door was our door.

“All my doubts and all my struggles dropped out of my mind when I made that discovery. There was no mistaking what this perpetual coming back to the house meant. Resist it as I might, it was to be.

“I opened the street door and went upstairs, and heard him sleeping his heavy sleep, exactly as I had heard him when I went out. I sat down on my bed and took off my bonnet, quite quiet in myself, because I knew it was to be. I damped the towel and put it ready, and took a turn in the room.

“It was just the dawn of day. The sparrows

were chirping among the trees in the square hard by.

“I drew up my blind; the faint light spoke to me as if in words, ‘Do it now, before I get brighter, and show too much.’

“I listened. The friendly silence had a word for me too: ‘Do it now, and trust the secret to Me.’

“I waited till the church clock chimed before striking the hour. At the first stroke—without touching the lock of his door, without setting foot in his room—I had the towel over his face. Before the last stroke he had ceased struggling. When the hum of the bell through the morning silence was still and dead, *he* was still and dead with it.

13.

“The rest of this history is counted in my mind by four days—Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. After that it all fades off like, and the new years come with a strange look, being the years of a new life.

“What about the old life first? What did I feel, in the horrid quiet of the morning, when I had done it?

“I don’t know what I felt. I can’t remember it, or I can’t tell it, I don’t know which. I can write the history of the four days, and that’s all.

“Wednesday.—I gave the alarm toward noon. Hours before, I had put things straight and fit to be seen. I had only to call for help, and to leave the people to do as they pleased. The

neighbors came in, and then the police. They knocked, uselessly, at his door. Then they broke it open, and found him dead in his bed.

“Not the ghost of a suspicion of me entered the mind of any one. There was no fear of human justice finding me out: my one unutterable dread was dread of an Avenging Providence. I had a short sleep that night, and a dream, in which I did the deed over again. For a time my mind was busy with thoughts of confessing to the police, and of giving myself up. If I had not belonged to a respectable family, I should have done it. From generation to generation there had been no stain on our good name. It would be death to my father, and disgrace to all my family, if I owned what I had done, and suffered for it on the public scaffold. I prayed to be guided; and I had a revelation, toward morning, of what to do.

“I was commanded, in a vision, to open the Bible, and vow on it to set my guilty self apart among my innocent fellow-creatures from that day forth; to live among them a separate and silent life; to dedicate the use of my speech to the language of prayer only, offered up in the solitude of my own chamber, when no human ear could hear me. Alone, in the morning, I saw the vision, and vowed the vow. No human ear *has* heard me from that time. No human ear *will* hear me, to the day of my death.

“Thursday.—The people came to speak to me, as usual. They found me dumb.

“What had happened to me in the past, when

my head had been hurt, and my speech affected by it, gave a likelier look to my dumbness than it might have borne in the case of another person. They took me back again to the hospital. The doctors were divided in opinion. Some said the shock of what had taken place in the house, coming on the back of the other shock, might, for all they knew, have done the mischief. And others said, 'She got her speech again after the accident; there has been no new injury since that time; the woman is shamming dumb, for some purpose of her own.' I let them dispute it as they liked. All human talk was nothing now to me. I had set myself apart among my fellow-creatures; I had begun my separate and silent life.

"Through all this time the sense of a coming punishment hanging over me never left my mind. I had nothing to dread from human justice. The judgment of an Avenging Providence—there was what I was waiting for.

"Friday.—They held the inquest. He had been known for years past as an inveterate drunkard; he had been seen overnight going home in liquor; he had been found locked up in his room, with the key inside the door, and the latch of the window bolted also. No fireplace was in this garret; nothing was disturbed or altered; nobody by human possibility could have got in. The doctor reported that he had died of congestion of the lungs; and the jury gave their verdict accordingly.

14.

“Saturday.—Marked forever in my calendar as the memorable day on which the judgment descended on me. Toward three o’clock in the afternoon—in the broad sunlight, under the cloudless sky, with hundreds of innocent human creatures all around me—I, Hester Dethridge, saw, for the first time, the Appearance which is appointed to haunt me for the rest of my life.

“I had had a terrible night. My mind felt much as it had felt on the evening when I had gone to the play. I went out to see what the air and the sunshine and the cool green of trees and grass would do for me. The nearest place in which I could find what I wanted was the Regent’s Park. I went into one of the quiet walks in the middle of the park, where the horses and carriages are not allowed to go, and where old people can sun themselves, and children play, without danger.

“I sat me down to rest on a bench. Among the children near me was a beautiful little boy, playing with a brand-new toy—a horse and wagon. While I was watching him busily plucking up the blades of grass and loading his wagon with them, I felt for the first time—what I have often and often felt since—a creeping chill come slowly over my flesh, and then a suspicion of something hidden near me, which would steal out and show itself if I looked that way.

“There was a big tree hard by. I looked toward the tree, and waited to see the something hidden appear from behind it.

“The Thing stole out, dark and shadowy in the pleasant sunlight. At first I saw only the dim figure of a woman. After a little it began to get plainer, brightening from within outward—brightening, brightening, brightening, till it set before me the vision of MY OWN SELF, repeated as if I was standing before a glass—the double of myself, looking at me with my own eyes. I saw it over the grass. I saw it stop behind the beautiful little boy. I saw it stand and listen, as I had stood and listened at the dawn of morning, for the chiming of the bell before the clock struck the hour. When it heard the stroke it pointed down to the boy with my own hand; and it said to me, with my own voice, ‘Kill him.’

“A time passed. I don’t know whether it was a minute or an hour. The heavens and the earth disappeared from before me. I saw nothing but the double of myself, with the pointing hand. I felt nothing but the longing to kill the boy.

“Then, as it seemed, the heavens and the earth rushed back upon me. I saw the people near staring in surprise at me, and wondering if I was in my right mind.

“I got, by main force, to my feet; I looked, by main force, away from the beautiful boy; I escaped, by main force, from the sight of the Thing, back into the streets. I can only describe the overpowering strength of the temptation that tried me in one way. It was like tearing the life out of me to tear myself from killing the boy. And what it was on this occasion it has been ever since. No remedy against it but in

that torturing effort, and no quenching the after-agony but by solitude and prayer.

“The sense of a coming punishment had hung over me. And the punishment had come. I had waited for the judgment of an Avenging Providence. And the judgment was pronounced. With pious David I could now say, Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; Thy terrors have cut me off.”

Arrived at that point in the narrative, Geoffrey looked up from the manuscript for the first time. Some sound outside the room had disturbed him. Was it a sound in the passage?

He listened. There was an interval of silence. He looked back again at the Confession, turning over the last leaves to count how much was left of it before it came to an end.

After relating the circumstances under which the writer had returned to domestic service, the narrative was resumed no more. Its few remaining pages were occupied by a fragmentary journal. The brief entries all referred to the various occasions on which Hester Dethridge had again and again seen the terrible apparition of herself, and had again and again resisted the homicidal frenzy roused in her by the hideous creation of her own distempered brain. In the effort which that resistance cost her lay the secret of her obstinate determination to insist on being freed from her work at certain times, and to

make it a condition with any mistress who employed her that she should be privileged to sleep in a room of her own at night. Having counted the pages thus filled, Geoffrey turned back to the place at which he had left off, to read the manuscript through to the end.

As his eyes rested on the first line the noise in the passage—intermitted for a moment only—disturbed him again.

This time there was no doubt of what the sound implied. He heard her hurried footsteps; he heard her dreadful cry. Hester Dethridge had woken in her chair in the parlor, and had discovered that the Confession was no longer in her own hands.

He put the manuscript into the breast-pocket of his coat. On *this* occasion his reading had been of some use to him. Needless to go on further with it. Needless to return to the Newgate Calendar. The problem was solved.

As he rose to his feet his heavy face brightened slowly with a terrible smile. While the woman's Confession was in his pocket the woman herself was in his power. "If she wants it back," he said, "she must get it on my terms." With that resolution he opened the door and met Hester Dethridge face to face in the passage.

CHAPTER THE FIFTY-FIFTH.

THE SIGNS OF THE END.

THE servant, appearing the next morning in Anne's room with the breakfast tray, closed the door with an air of mystery, and announced that strange things were going on in the house.

"Did you hear nothing last night, ma'am," she asked, "downstairs in the passage?"

"I thought I heard some voices whispering outside my room," Anne replied. "Has anything happened?"

Extricated from the confusion in which she involved it, the girl's narrative amounted in substance to this: She had been startled by the sudden appearance of her mistress in the passage, staring about her wildly, like a woman who had gone out of her senses. Almost at the same moment "the master" had flung open the drawing-room door. He had caught Mrs. Dethridge by the arm, had dragged her into the room, and had closed the door again. After the two had remained shut up together for more than half an hour, Mrs. Dethridge had come out as pale as ashes, and had gone upstairs trembling like a person in great terror. Some time later, when the servant was in bed, but not asleep, she had seen a light under her door, in the narrow wooden passage which separated Anne's bedroom from Hester's bedroom, and by which she obtained access to her own little sleeping-chamber beyond.

She had got out of bed; had looked through the key-hole; and had seen "the master" and Mrs. Dethridge standing together examining the walls of the passage. "The master" had laid his hand upon the wall, on the side of his wife's room, and had looked at Mrs. Dethridge. And Mrs. Dethridge had looked back at him, and had shaken her head. Upon that he had said in a whisper (still with his hand on the wooden wall), "Not to be done here?" And Mrs. Dethridge had shaken her head. He had considered a moment, and had whispered again, "The other room will do, won't it?" And Mrs. Dethridge had nodded her head—and so they had parted. That was the story of the night. Early in the morning, more strange things had happened. The master had gone out, with a large sealed packet in his hand, covered with many stamps; taking his own letter to the post, instead of sending the servant with it as usual. On his return, Mrs. Dethridge had gone out next, and had come back with something in a jar which she had locked up in her own sitting-room. Shortly afterward, a workingman had brought a bundle of laths, and some mortar and plaster of Paris, which had been carefully placed together in a corner of the scullery. Last, and most remarkable in the series of domestic events, the girl had received permission to go home and see her friends in the country, on that very day; having been previously informed, when she entered Mrs. Dethridge's service, that she was not to expect to have a holiday granted to her until

after Christmas. Such were the strange things which had happened in the house since the previous night. What was the interpretation to be placed on them?

The right interpretation was not easy to discover.

Some of the events pointed apparently toward coming repairs or alterations in the cottage. But what Geoffrey could have to do with them (being at the time served with a notice to quit), and why Hester Dethridge should have shown the violent agitation which had been described, were mysteries which it was impossible to penetrate.

Anne dismissed the girl with a little present and a few kind words. Under other circumstances, the incomprehensible proceedings in the house might have made her seriously uneasy. But her mind was now occupied by more pressing anxieties. Blanche's second letter (received from Hester Dethridge on the previous evening) informed her that Sir Patrick persisted in his resolution, and that he and his niece might be expected, come what might of it, to present themselves at the cottage on that day.

Anne opened the letter and looked at it for the second time. The passages relating to Sir Patrick were expressed in these terms:

“I don't think, darling, you have any idea of the interest that you have roused in my uncle. Although he has not to reproach himself, as I have, with being the miserable cause of the sacrifice that you have made, he is quite as wretched

and quite as anxious about you as I am. We talk of nobody else. He said last night that he did not believe there was your equal in the world. Think of that from a man who has such terribly sharp eyes for the faults of women in general, and such a terribly sharp tongue in talking of them! I am pledged to secrecy; but I must tell you one other thing between ourselves. Lord Holchester's announcement that his brother refuses to consent to a separation put my uncle almost beside himself. If there is not some change for the better in your life in a few days' time, Sir Patrick will find out a way of his own—lawful or not, he doesn't care—for rescuing you from the dreadful position in which you are placed, and Arnold (with my full approval) will help him. As we understand it, you are, under one pretense or another, kept a close prisoner. Sir Patrick has already secured a post of observation near you. He and Arnold went all round the cottage last night, and examined a door in your back garden wall, with a locksmith to help them. You will no doubt hear further about this from Sir Patrick himself. Pray don't appear to know anything of it when you see him! I am not in his confidence—but Arnold is, which comes to the same thing exactly. You will see us (I mean you will see my uncle and me) tomorrow, in spite of the brute who keeps you under lock and key. Arnold will not accompany us; he is not to be trusted (he owns it himself) to control his indignation. Courage, dearest! There are two people in the world to whom you

are inestimably precious, and who are determined not to let your happiness be sacrificed. I am one of them, and (for Heaven's sake keep this a secret also!) Sir Patrick is the other."

Absorbed in the letter, and in the conflict of opposite feelings which it roused—her color rising when it turned her thoughts inward on herself, and fading again when she was reminded by it of the coming visit—Anne was called back to a sense of present events by the re-appearance of the servant, charged with a message. Mr. Speedwell had been for some time in the cottage, and he was now waiting to see her downstairs.

Anne found the surgeon alone in the drawing-room. He apologized for disturbing her at that early hour.

"It was impossible for me to get to Fulham yesterday," he said, "and I could only make sure of complying with Lord Holchester's request by coming here before the time at which I receive patients at home. I have seen Mr. Delamayn, and I have requested permission to say a word to you on the subject of his health."

Anne looked through the window, and saw Geoffrey smoking his pipe—not in the back garden, as usual, but in front of the cottage, where he could keep his eye on the gate.

"Is he ill?" she asked.

"He is seriously ill," answered Mr. Speedwell. "I should not otherwise have troubled you with this interview. It is a matter of professional duty to warn you, as his wife, that he is in danger. He may be seized at any moment

by a paralytic stroke. The only chance for him—a very poor one, I am bound to say—is to make him alter his present mode of life without loss of time.”

“In one way he will be obliged to alter it,” said Anne. “He has received notice from the landlady to quit this cottage.”

Mr. Speedwell looked surprised.

“I think you will find that the notice has been withdrawn,” he said. “I can only assure you that Mr. Delamayn distinctly informed me, when I advised change of air, that he had decided, for reasons of his own, on remaining here.”

(Another in the series of incomprehensible domestic events! Hester Dethridge—on all other occasions the most immovable of women—had changed her mind!)

“Setting that aside,” proceeded the surgeon, “there are two preventive measures which I feel bound to suggest. Mr. Delamayn is evidently suffering (though he declines to admit it himself) from mental anxiety. If he is to have a chance for his life, that anxiety must be set at rest. Is it in your power to relieve it?”

“It is not even in my power, Mr. Speedwell, to tell you what it is.”

The surgeon bowed, and went on:

“The second caution that I have to give you,” he said, “is to keep him from drinking spirits. He admits having committed an excess in that way the night before last. In his state of health, drinking means literally death. If he goes back to the brandy-bottle—forgive me for saying it

plainly; the matter is too serious to be trifled with—if he goes back to the brandy-bottle, his life, in my opinion, is not worth five minutes' purchase. Can you keep him from drinking?"

Anne answered sadly and plainly:

"I have no influence over him. The terms we are living on here—"

Mr. Speedwell considerably stopped her.

"I understand," he said. "I will see his brother on my way home." He looked for a moment at Anne. "You are far from well yourself," he resumed. "Can I do anything for you?"

"While I am living my present life, Mr. Speedwell, not even your skill can help me."

The surgeon took his leave. Anne hurried back upstairs, before Geoffrey could re-enter the cottage. To see the man who had laid her life waste—to meet the vindictive hatred that looked furtively at her out of his eyes—at the moment when sentence of death had been pronounced on him, was an ordeal from which every finer instinct in her nature shrank in horror.

Hour by hour the morning wore on, and he made no attempt to communicate with her. Stranger still, Hester Dethridge never appeared. The servant came upstairs to say good-by; and went away for her holiday. Shortly afterward, certain sounds reached Anne's ears from the opposite side of the passage. She heard the strokes of a hammer, and then a noise as of some heavy piece of furniture being moved. The mysterious repairs were apparently being begun in the spare room.

She went to the window. The hour was approaching at which Sir Patrick and Blanche might be expected to make the attempt to see her.

For the third time she looked at the letter.

It suggested, on this occasion, a new consideration to her. Did the strong measures which Sir Patrick had taken in secret indicate alarm as well as sympathy? Did he believe she was in a position in which the protection of the law was powerless to reach her? It seemed just possible. Suppose she were free to consult a magistrate, and to own to him (if words could express it) the vague presentiment of danger which was then present in her mind—what proof could she produce to satisfy the mind of a stranger? The proofs were all in her husband's favor. Witnesses could testify to the conciliatory words which he had spoken to her in their presence. The evidence of his mother and brother would show that he had preferred to sacrifice his own pecuniary interests rather than consent to part with her. She could furnish nobody with the smallest excuse, in her case, for interfering between man and wife. Did Sir Patrick see this? And did Blanche's description of what he and Arnold Brinkworth were doing point to the conclusion that they were taking the law into their own hands in despair? The more she thought of it, the more likely it seemed.

She was still pursuing the train of thought thus suggested, when the gate-bell rang.

The noises in the spare room suddenly stopped.

Anne looked out. The roof of a carriage was

visible on the other side of the wall. Sir Patrick and Blanche had arrived. After an interval Hester Dethridge appeared in the garden, and went to the grating in the gate. Anne heard Sir Patrick's voice, clear and resolute. Every word he said reached her ears through the open window.

"Be so good as to give my card to Mr. Delamayn. Say that I bring him a message from Holchester House, and that I can only deliver it at a personal interview."

Hester Dethridge returned to the cottage. Another and a longer interval elapsed. At the end of the time, Geoffrey himself appeared in the front garden, with the key in his hand. Anne's heart throbbed fast as she saw him unlock the gate, and asked herself what was to follow.

To her unutterable astonishment, Geoffrey admitted Sir Patrick without the slightest hesitation—and, more still, he invited Blanche to leave the carriage and come in!

"Let bygones be bygones," Anne heard him say to Sir Patrick. "I only want to do the right thing. If it's the right thing for visitors to come here so soon after my father's death, come, and welcome. My own notion was, when you proposed it before, that it was wrong. I am not much versed in these things. I leave it to you."

"A visitor who brings you messages from your mother and your brother," Sir Patrick answered, gravely, "is a person whom it is your duty to admit, Mr. Delamayn, under any circumstances."

“And he ought to be none the less welcome,” added Blanche, “when he is accompanied by your wife’s oldest and dearest friend.”

Geoffrey looked in stolid submission from one to the other.

“I am not much versed in these things,” he repeated. “I have said already, I leave it to you.”

They were by this time close under Anne’s window. She showed herself. Sir Patrick took off his hat. Blanche kissed her hand with a cry of joy, and attempted to enter the cottage. Geoffrey stopped her—and called to his wife to come down.

“No, no!” said Blanche. “Let me go up to her in her room.”

She attempted for the second time to gain the stairs. For the second time, Geoffrey stopped her. “Don’t trouble yourself,” he said; “she is coming down.”

Anne joined them in the front garden. Blanche flew into her arms and devoured her with kisses. Sir Patrick took her hand in silence. For the first time in Anne’s experience of him, the bright, resolute, self-reliant old man was, for the moment, at a loss what to say, at a loss what to do. His eyes, resting on her in mute sympathy and interest, said plainly, “In your husband’s presence I must not trust myself to speak.”

Geoffrey broke the silence.

“Will you go into the drawing-room?” he asked, looking with steady attention at his wife and Blanche.

Geoffrey's voice appeared to rouse Sir Patrick. He raised his head—he looked like himself again.

“Why go indoors this lovely weather?” he said. “Suppose we take a turn in the garden?”

Blanche pressed Anne's hand significantly. The proposal was evidently made for a purpose. They turned the corner of the cottage and gained the large garden at the back—the two ladies walking together arm in arm; Sir Patrick and Geoffrey following them. Little by little, Blanche quickened her pace. “I have got my instructions,” she whispered to Anne. “Let's get out of his hearing.”

It was more easily said than done. Geoffrey kept close behind them.

“Consider my lameness, Mr. Delamayn,” said Sir Patrick. “Not quite so fast.”

It was well intended. But Geoffrey's cunning had taken the alarm. Instead of dropping behind with Sir Patrick, he called to his wife.

“Consider Sir Patrick's lameness,” he repeated. “Not quite so fast.”

Sir Patrick met that check with characteristic readiness. When Anne slackened her pace, he addressed himself to Geoffrey, stopping deliberately in the middle of the path. “Let me give you my message from Holchester House,” he said. The two ladies were still slowly walking on. Geoffrey was placed between the alternatives of staying with Sir Patrick and leaving them by themselves, or of following them and leaving Sir Patrick. Deliberately, on his side, he followed the ladies.

Sir Patrick called him back. "I told you I wished to speak to you," he said, sharply.

Driven to bay, Geoffrey openly revealed his resolution to give Blanche no opportunity of speaking in private to Anne. He called to Anne to stop.

"I have no secrets from my wife," he said. "And I expect my wife to have no secrets from me. Give me the message in her hearing."

Sir Patrick's eyes brightened with indignation. He controlled himself, and looked for an instant significantly at his niece before he spoke to Geoffrey.

"As you please," he said. "Your brother requests me to tell you that the duties of the new position in which he is placed occupy the whole of his time, and will prevent him from returning to Fulham, as he had proposed, for some days to come. Lady Holchester, hearing that I was likely to see you, has charged me with another message from herself. She is not well enough to leave home; and she wishes to see you at Holchester House to-morrow—accompanied (as she specially desires) by Mrs. Delamayn."

In giving the two messages, he gradually raised his voice to a louder tone than usual. While he was speaking, Blanche (warned to follow her instructions by the glance her uncle had cast at her) lowered her voice, and said to Anne:

"He won't consent to the separation as long as he has got you here. He is trying for higher

terms. Leave him, and he must submit. Put a candle in your window, if you can get into the garden to-night. If not, any other night. Make for the back gate in the wall. Sir Patrick and Arnold will manage the rest."

She slipped those words into Anne's ears—swinging her parasol to and fro, and looking as if the merest gossip was dropping from her lips—with the dexterity which rarely fails a woman when she is called on to assist a deception in which her own interests are concerned. Cleverly as it had been done, however, Geoffrey's inveterate distrust was stirred into action by it. Blanche had got to her last sentence before he was able to turn his attention from what Sir Patrick was saying to what his niece was saying. A quicker man would have heard more. Geoffrey had only distinctly heard the first half of the last sentence.

"What's that," he asked, "about Sir Patrick and Arnold?"

"Nothing very interesting to you," Blanche answered, readily. "I will repeat it if you like. I was telling Anne about my stepmother, Lady Lundie. After what happened that day in Portland Place, she has requested Sir Patrick and Arnold to consider themselves, for the future, as total strangers to her. That's all."

"Oh!" said Geoffrey, eying her narrowly. "That's all?"

"Ask my uncle," returned Blanche, "if you don't believe that I have reported her correctly. She gave us all our dismissal, in her most mag-

nificent manner, and in those very words. Didn't she, Sir Patrick?"

It was perfectly true. Blanche's readiness of resource had met the emergency of the moment by describing something, in connection with Sir Patrick and Arnold, which had really happened. Silenced on one side, in spite of himself, Geoffrey was at the same moment pressed on the other, for an answer to his mother's message.

"I must take your reply to Lady Holchester," said Sir Patrick. "What is it to be?"

Geoffrey looked hard at him, without making any reply.

Sir Patrick repeated the message—with a special emphasis on that part of it which related to Anne. The emphasis roused Geoffrey's temper.

"You and my mother have made that message up between you, to try me!" he burst out. "D—n all underhand work, is what *I* say!"

"I am waiting for your answer," persisted Sir Patrick, steadily ignoring the words which had just been addressed to him.

Geoffrey glanced at Anne, and suddenly recovered himself.

"My love to my mother," he said. "I'll go to her to-morrow—and take my wife with me, with the greatest pleasure. Do you hear that? With the greatest pleasure." He stopped to observe the effect of his reply. Sir Patrick waited impenetrably to hear more—if he had more to say. "I'm sorry I lost my temper just now," he resumed. "I am badly treated—I'm dis-

trusted without a cause. I ask you to bear witness," he added, his voice getting louder again, while his eyes moved uneasily backward and forward between Sir Patrick and Anne, "that I treat my wife as becomes a lady. Her friend calls on her—and she's free to receive her friend. My mother wants to see her—and I promise to take her to my mother's. At two o'clock to-morrow. Where am I to blame? You stand there looking at me and saying nothing. Where am I to blame?"

"If a man's own conscience justifies him, Mr. Delamayn," said Sir Patrick, "the opinions of others are of very little importance. My errand here is performed."

As he turned to bid Anne farewell, the uneasiness that he felt at leaving her forced its way to view. The color faded out of his face. His hand trembled as it closed tenderly and firmly on hers. "I shall see you to-morrow at Holchester House," he said; giving his arm while he spoke to Blanche. He took leave of Geoffrey without looking at him again, and without seeing his offered hand. In another minute they were gone.

Anne waited on the lower floor of the cottage, while Geoffrey closed and locked the gate. She had no wish to appear to avoid him, after the answer that he had sent to his mother's message. He returned slowly half-way across the front garden, looked toward the passage in which she was standing, passed before the door, and disappeared round the corner of the cottage

on his way to the back garden. The inference was not to be mistaken. It was Geoffrey who was avoiding *her*. Had he lied to Sir Patrick? When the next day came, would he find reasons of his own for refusing to take her to Holchester House?

She went upstairs. At the same moment Hester Dethridge opened her bedroom door to come out. Observing Anne, she closed it again; and remained invisible in her room. Once more the inference was not to be mistaken. Hester Dethridge, also, had her reasons for avoiding Anne.

What did it mean? What object could there be in common between Hester and Geoffrey?

There was no fathoming the meaning of it. Anne's thoughts reverted to the communication which had been secretly made to her by Blanche. It was not in womanhood to be insensible to such devotion as Sir Patrick's conduct implied. Terrible as her position had become in its ever-growing uncertainty, in its never-ending suspense, the oppression of it yielded for the moment to the glow of pride and gratitude which warmed her heart, as she thought of the sacrifices that had been made, of the perils that were still to be encountered, solely for her sake. To shorten the period of suspense seemed to be a duty which she owed to Sir Patrick, as well as to herself. Why, in her situation, wait for what the next day might bring forth? If the opportunity offered, she determined to put the signal in the window that night.

Toward evening she heard once more the noises

which appeared to indicate that repairs of some sort were going on in the house. This time the sounds were fainter; and they came, as she fancied, not from the spare room, as before, but from Geoffrey's room, next to it.

The dinner was later than usual that day. Hester Dethridge did not appear with the tray till dusk. Anne spoke to her, and received a mute sign in answer. Determined to see the woman's face plainly, she put a question which required a written answer on the slate; and, telling Hester to wait, went to the mantel-piece to light her candle. When she turned round with the lighted candle in her hand, Hester was gone.

Night came. She rang her bell to have the tray taken away. The fall of a strange footstep startled her outside her door. She called out, "Who's there?" The voice of the lad whom Geoffrey employed to go on errands for him answered her.

"What do you want here?" she asked, through the door.

"Mr. Delamayn sent me up, ma'am. He wishes to speak to you directly."

Anne found Geoffrey in the dining-room. His object in wishing to speak to her was, on the surface of it, trivial enough. He wanted to know how she would prefer going to Holchester House on the next day—by the railway, or in a carriage. "If you prefer driving," he said, "the boy has come here for orders; and he can tell them to send a carriage from the livery-stables as he goes home."

"The railway will do perfectly well for me," Anne replied.

Instead of accepting the answer, and dropping the subject, he asked her to reconsider her decision. There was an absent, uneasy expression in his eye as he begged her not to consult economy at the expense of her own comfort. He appeared to have some reason of his own for preventing her from leaving the room. "Sit down a minute, and think before you decide," he said. Having forced her to take a chair, he put his head outside the door, and directed the lad to go upstairs and see if he had left his pipe in his bedroom. "I want you to go in comfort, as a lady should," he repeated, with the uneasy look more marked than ever. Before Anne could reply, the lad's voice reached them from the bedroom floor, raised in shrill alarm, and screaming "Fire!"

Geoffrey ran upstairs. Anne followed him. The lad met them at the top of the stairs. He pointed to the open door of Anne's room. She was absolutely certain of having left her lighted candle, when she went down to Geoffrey, at a safe distance from the bed-curtains. The bed-curtains, nevertheless, were in a blaze of fire.

There was a supply of water to the cottage on the upper floor. The bedroom jugs and cans, usually in their places at an earlier hour, were standing that night at the cistern. An empty pail was left near them. Directing the lad to bring him water from these resources, Geoffrey tore down the curtains in a flaming heap, partly on the bed and partly on the sofa near it. Using

the can and the pail alternately, as the boy brought them, he drenched the bed and the sofa. It was all over in little more than a minute. The cottage was saved, but the bed-furniture was destroyed; and the room, as a matter of course, was rendered uninhabitable, for that night at least, and probably for more nights to come.

Geoffrey set down the empty pail, and, turning to Anne, pointed across the passage.

“You won’t be much inconvenienced by this,” he said. “You have only to shift your quarters to the spare room.”

With the assistance of the lad, he moved Anne’s boxes, and the chest of drawers, which had escaped damage, into the opposite room. This done, he cautioned her to be careful with her candles for the future—and went downstairs, without waiting to hear what she said in reply. The lad followed him, and was dismissed for the night.

Even in the confusion which attended the extinguishing of the fire, the conduct of Hester Dethridge had been remarkable enough to force itself on the attention of Anne.

She had come out from her bedroom when the alarm was given; had looked at the flaming curtains; and had drawn back, stolidly submissive, into a corner to wait the event. There she had stood—to all appearance, utterly indifferent to the possible destruction of her own cottage. The fire extinguished, she still waited impenetrably in her corner, while the chest of drawers and the boxes were being moved—then locked the

door, without even a passing glance at the scorched ceiling and the burned bed-furniture—put the key into her pocket—and went back to her room.

Anne had hitherto not shared the conviction felt by most other persons who were brought into contact with Hester Dethridge, that the woman's mind was deranged. After what she had just seen, however, the general impression became her impression too. She had thought of putting certain questions to Hester, when they were left together, as to the origin of the fire. Reflection decided her on saying nothing, for that night at least. She crossed the passage, and entered the spare room—the room which she had declined to occupy on her arrival at the cottage, and which she was obliged to sleep in now.

She was instantly struck by a change in the disposition of the furniture of the room.

The bed had been moved. The head—set, when she had last seen it, against the side wall of the cottage—was placed now against the partition wall which separated the room from Geoffrey's room. This new arrangement had evidently been effected with a settled purpose of some sort. The hook in the ceiling which supported the curtains (the bed, unlike the bed in the other room, having no canopy attached to it) had been moved so as to adapt itself to the change that had been made. The chairs and the wash-hand-stand, formerly placed against the partition wall, were now, as a matter of necessity, shifted over to the vacant space against the side wall of

the cottage. For the rest, no other alteration was visible in any part of the room.

In Anne's situation any event not immediately intelligible on the face of it was an event to be distrusted. Was there a motive for the change in the position of the bed? And was it, by any chance, a motive in which she was concerned?

The doubt had barely occurred to her, before a startling suspicion succeeded it. Was there some secret purpose to be answered by making her sleep in the spare room? Did the question which the servant had heard Geoffrey put to Hester on the previous night refer to this? Had the fire which had so unaccountably caught the curtains in her own room been, by any possibility, a fire purposely kindled, to force her out?

She dropped into the nearest chair, faint with horror, as those three questions forced themselves in rapid succession on her mind.

After waiting a little, she recovered self-possession enough to recognize the first plain necessity of putting her suspicions to the test. It was possible that her excited fancy had filled her with a purely visionary alarm. For all she knew to the contrary, there might be some undeniably sufficient reason for changing the position of the bed. She went out, and knocked at the door of Hester Dethridge's room.

"I want to speak to you," she said.

Hester came out. Anne pointed to the spare room, and led the way to it. Hester followed her.

"Why have you changed the place of the bed," she asked, "from the wall there to the wall here?"

Stolidly submissive to the question, as she had been stolidly submissive to the fire, Hester Dethridge wrote her reply. On all other occasions she was accustomed to look the persons to whom she offered her slate steadily in the face. Now, for the first time, she handed it to Anne with her eyes on the floor. The one line written contained no direct answer: the words were these:

“I have meant to move it for some time past.”

“I ask you why you have moved it.”

She wrote these four words on the slate: “The wall is damp.”

Anne looked at the wall. There was no sign of damp on the paper. She passed her hand over it. Feel where she might, the wall was dry.

“That is not your reason,” she said.

Hester stood immovable.

“There is no dampness in the wall.”

Hester pointed persistently with her pencil to the four words, still without looking up—waited a moment for Anne to read them again—and left the room.

It was plainly useless to call her back. Anne’s first impulse when she was alone again was to secure the door. She not only locked it, but bolted it at top and bottom. The mortise of the lock and the staples of the bolts, when she tried them, were firm. The lurking treachery—wherever else it might be—was not in the fastenings of the door.

She looked all round the room; examining the fireplace, the window and its shutters, the inte-

rior of the wardrobe, the hidden space under the bed. Nothing was anywhere to be discovered which could justify the most timid person living in feeling suspicion or alarm.

Appearances, fair as they were, failed to convince her. The presentiment of some hidden treachery, steadily getting nearer and nearer to her in the dark, had rooted itself firmly in her mind. She sat down and tried to trace her way back to the clew through the earlier events of the day.

The effort was fruitless: nothing definite, nothing tangible, rewarded it. Worse still, a new doubt grew out of it—a doubt whether the motive which Sir Patrick had avowed (through Blanche) was the motive for helping her which was really in his mind.

Did he sincerely believe Geoffrey's conduct to be animated by no worse object than a mercenary object? and was his only purpose, in planning to remove her out of her husband's reach, to force Geoffrey's consent to their separation on the terms which Julius had proposed? Was this really the sole end that he had in view? or was he secretly convinced (knowing Anne's position as he knew it) that she was in personal danger at the cottage? and had he considerately kept that conviction concealed, in the fear that he might otherwise encourage her to feel alarmed about herself? She looked round the strange room in the silence of the night, and she felt that the latter interpretation was the likeliest interpretation of the two.

The sounds caused by the closing of the doors and windows reached her from the ground-floor. What was to be done?

It was impossible to show the signal which had been agreed on to Sir Patrick and Arnold. The window in which they expected to see it was the window of the room in which the fire had broken out—the room which Hester Dethridge had locked up for the night.

It was equally hopeless to wait until the policeman passed on his beat, and to call for help. Even if she could prevail upon herself to make that open acknowledgment of distrust under her husband's roof, and even if help was near, what valid reason could she give for raising an alarm? There was not the shadow of a reason to justify any one in placing her under the protection of the law.

As a last resource, impelled by her blind distrust of the change in the position of the bed, she attempted to move it. The utmost exertion of her strength did not suffice to stir the heavy piece of furniture out of its place by so much as a hairbreadth.

There was no alternative but to trust to the security of the locked and bolted door, and to keep watch through the night—certain that Sir Patrick and Arnold were, on their part, also keeping watch in the near neighborhood of the cottage. She took out her work and her books; and returned to her chair, placing it near the table, in the middle of the room.

The last noises which told of life and move-

ment about her died away. The breathless stillness of the night closed round her.

CHAPTER THE FIFTY-SIXTH.

THE MEANS.

THE new day dawned; the sun rose; the household was astir again. Inside the spare room, and outside the spare room, nothing had happened.

At the hour appointed for leaving the cottage to pay the promised visit to Holcnester House, Hester Dethridge and Geoffrey were alone together in the bedroom in which Anne had passed the night.

"She's dressed, and waiting for me in the front garden," said Geoffrey. "You wanted to see me here alone. What is it?"

Hester pointed to the bed.

"You want it moved from the wall?"

Hester nodded her head.

They moved the bed some feet away from the partition wall. After a momentary pause, Geoffrey spoke again.

"It must be done to-night," he said. "Her friends may interfere; the girl may come back. It must be done to-night."

Hester bowed her head slowly.

"How long do you want to be left by yourself in the house?"

She held up three of her fingers.

“Does that mean three hours?”

She nodded her head.

“Will it be done in that time?”

She made the affirmative sign once more.

Thus far she had never lifted her eyes to his. In her manner of listening to him when he spoke, in the slightest movement that she made when necessity required it, the same lifeless submission to him, the same mute horror of him, was expressed. He had, thus far, silently resented this, on his side. On the point of leaving the room the restraint which he had laid on himself gave way. For the first time he resented it in words.

“Why the devil can't you look at me?” he asked.

She let the question pass, without a sign to show that she had heard him. He angrily repeated it. She wrote on her slate, and held it out to him—still without raising her eyes to his face.

“You know you can speak,” he said. “You know I have found you out. What's the use of playing the fool with *me*?”

She persisted in holding the slate before him. He read these words:

“I am dumb to you, and blind to you. Let me be.”

“Let you be!” he repeated. “It's a little late in the day to be scrupulous, after what you have done. Do you want your Confession back, or not?”

As the reference to the Confession passed his lips, she raised her head. A faint tinge of color showed itself on her livid cheeks; a momentary spasm of pain stirred her death-like face. The one last interest left in the woman's life was the interest of recovering the manuscript which had been taken from her. To *that* appeal the stunned intelligence still faintly answered—and to no other.

“Remember the bargain on your side,” Geoffrey went on, “and I’ll remember the bargain on mine. This is how it stands, you know. I have read your Confession; and I find one thing wanting. You don’t tell how it was done. I know you smothered him; but I don’t know how. I want to know. You’re dumb; and you can’t tell me. You must do to the wall here what you did in the other house. You run no risks. There isn’t a soul to see you. You have got the place to yourself. When I come back let me find this wall like the other wall—at that small hour of the morning, you know, when you were waiting, with the towel in your hand, for the first stroke of the clock. Let me find that, and to-morrow you shall have your Confession back again.”

As the reference to the Confession passed his lips for the second time, the sinking energy in the woman leaped up in her once more. She snatched her slate from her side, and, writing on it rapidly, held it, with both hands, close under his eyes. He read these words:

“I won’t wait. I must have it to-night.”

“Do you think I keep your Confession about

me?" said Geoffrey. "I haven't even got it in the house."

She staggered back, and looked up for the first time.

"Don't alarm yourself," he went on. "It's sealed up with my seal; and it's safe in my bankers' keeping. I posted it to them myself. You don't stick at a trifle, Mrs. Dethridge. If I had kept it locked up in the house, you might have forced the lock when my back was turned. If I had kept it about me—I might have had that towel over my face, in the small hours of the morning! The bankers will give you back your Confession—just as they have received it from me—on receipt of an order in my handwriting. Do what I have told you, and you shall have the order to-night."

She passed her apron over her face, and drew a long breath of relief. Geoffrey turned to the door.

"I will be back at six this evening," he said. "Shall I find it done?"

She bowed her head. His first condition accepted, he proceeded to the second.

"When the opportunity offers," he resumed, "I shall go up to my room. I shall ring the dining-room bell first. You will go up before me when you hear that—and you will show me how you did it in the empty house?"

She made the affirmative sign once more.

At the same moment the door in the passage below was opened and closed again. Geoffrey instantly went downstairs. It was possible that

Anne might have forgotten something; and it was necessary to prevent her from returning to her own room.

They met in the passage.

“Tired of waiting in the garden?” he asked, abruptly.

She pointed to the dining-room.

“The postman has just given me a letter for you, through the grating in the gate,” she answered. “I have put it on the table in there.”

He went in. The handwriting on the address of the letter was the handwriting of Mrs. Glenarm. He put it unread into his pocket, and went back to Anne.

“Step out!” he said. “We shall lose the train.”

They started for their visit to Holchester House.

CHAPTER THE FIFTY-SEVENTH.

THE END.

At a few minutes before six o'clock that evening, Lord Holchester's carriage brought Geoffrey and Anne back to the cottage.

Geoffrey prevented the servant from ringing at the gate. He had taken the key with him, when he left home earlier in the day. Having admitted Anne, and having closed the gate again, he went on before her to the kitchen window, and called to Hester Dethridge.

“Take some cold water into the drawing-room,

and fill the vase on the chimney-piece," he said. "The sooner you put those flowers into water," he added, turning to his wife, "the longer they will last."

He pointed, as he spoke, to a nosegay in Anne's hand, which Julius had gathered for her from the conservatory at Holchester House. Leaving her to arrange the flowers in the vase, he went upstairs. After waiting for a moment, he was joined by Hester Dethridge.

"Done?" he asked, in a whisper.

Hester made the affirmative sign. Geoffrey took off his boots and led the way into the spare room. They noiselessly moved the bed back to its place against the partition wall, and left the room again. When Anne entered it, some minutes afterward, not the slightest change of any kind was visible since she had last seen it in the middle of the day.

She removed her bonnet and mantle, and sat down to rest.

The whole course of events, since the previous night, had tended one way, and had exerted the same delusive influence over her mind. It was impossible for her any longer to resist the conviction that she had distrusted appearances without the slightest reason, and that she had permitted purely visionary suspicions to fill her with purely causeless alarm. In the firm belief that she was in danger, she had watched through the night—and nothing had happened. In the confident anticipation that Geoffrey had promised what he was resolved not to perform, she had

waited to see what excuse he would find for keeping her at the cottage. And, when the time came for the visit, she found him ready to fulfill the engagement which he had made. At Holchester House, not the slightest interference had been attempted with her perfect liberty of action and speech. Resolved to inform Sir Patrick that she had changed her room, she had described the alarm of fire and the events which had succeeded it, in the fullest detail—and had not been once checked by Geoffrey from beginning to end. She had spoken in confidence to Blanche, and had never been interrupted. Walking round the conservatory, she had dropped behind the others with perfect impunity, to say a grateful word to Sir Patrick, and to ask if the interpretation that he placed on Geoffrey's conduct was really the interpretation which had been hinted at by Blanche. They had talked together for ten minutes or more. Sir Patrick had assured her that Blanche had correctly represented his opinion. He had declared his conviction that the rash way was, in her case, the right way; and that she would do well (with his assistance) to take the initiative, in the matter of the separation, on herself. "As long as he can keep you under the same roof with him"—Sir Patrick had said—"so long he will speculate on our anxiety to release you from the oppression of living with him; and so long he will hold out with his brother (in the character of a penitent husband) for higher terms. Put the signal in the window, and try the experiment to-night. Once find your way to the gar-

den door, and I answer for keeping you safely out of his reach until he has submitted to the separation, and has signed the deed." In those words, he had urged Anne to prompt action. He had received, in return, her promise to be guided by his advice. She had gone back to the drawing-room; and Geoffrey had made no remark on her absence. She had returned to Fulham, alone with him in his brother's carriage; and he had asked no questions. What was it natural, with her means of judging, to infer from all this? Could she see into Sir Patrick's mind, and detect that he was deliberately concealing his own conviction, in the fear that he might paralyze her energies if he acknowledged the alarm for her that he really felt? No. She could only accept the false appearances that surrounded her in the disguise of truth. She could only adopt, in good faith, Sir Patrick's assumed point of view, and believe, on the evidence of her own observation, that Sir Patrick was right.

Toward dusk, Anne began to feel the exhaustion which was the necessary result of a night passed without sleep. She rang her bell, and asked for some tea.

Hester Dethridge answered the bell. Instead of making the usual sign, she stood considering—and then wrote on her slate. These were the words: "I have all the work to do, now the girl has gone. If you would have your tea in the drawing-room, you would save me another journey upstairs."

Anne at once engaged to comply with the request.

“Are you ill?” she asked; noticing, faint as the light now was, something strangely altered in Hester’s manner.

Without looking up, Hester shook her head.

“Has anything happened to vex you?”

The negative sign was repeated.

“Have I offended you?”

She suddenly advanced a step; suddenly looked at Anne; checked herself with a dull moan, like a moan of pain; and hurried out of the room.

Concluding that she had inadvertently said or done something to offend Hester Dethridge, Anne determined to return to the subject at the first favorable opportunity. In the meantime she descended to the ground-floor. The dining-room door, standing wide open, showed her Geoffrey sitting at the table, writing a letter, with the fatal brandy-bottle at his side.

After what Mr. Speedwell had told her, it was her duty to interfere. She performed her duty without an instant’s hesitation.

“Pardon me for interrupting you,” she said. “I think you have forgotten what Mr. Speedwell told you about that.”

She pointed to the bottle. Geoffrey looked at it; looked down again at his letter, and impatiently shook his head. She made a second attempt at remonstrance—again without effect. He only said, “All right!” in lower tones than were customary with him, and continued his oc-

cupation. It was useless to court a third repulse. Anne went into the drawing-room.

The letter on which he was engaged was an answer to Mrs. Glenarm, who had written to tell him that she was leaving town. He had reached his two concluding sentences when Anne spoke to him. They ran as follows: "I may have news to bring you, before long, which you don't look for. Stay where you are through to-morrow, and wait to hear from me."

After sealing the envelope, he emptied his glass of brandy-and-water, and waited, looking through the open door. When Hester Dethridge crossed the passage with the tea-tray, and entered the drawing-room, he gave the sign which had been agreed on. He rang his bell. Hester came out again, closing the drawing-room door behind her.

"Is she safe at her tea?" he asked, removing his heavy boots, and putting on the slippers which were placed ready for him.

Hester bowed her head.

He pointed up the stairs. "You go first," he whispered. "No nonsense! and no noise!"

She ascended the stairs. He followed slowly. Although he had only drunk one glass of brandy-and-water, his step was uncertain already. With one hand on the wall, and one hand on the banister, he made his way to the top; stopped, and listened for a moment; then joined Hester in his own room, and softly locked the door.

"Well?" he said.

She was standing motionless in the middle of

the room—not like a living woman—like a machine waiting to be set in movement. Finding it useless to speak to her, he touched her (with a strange sensation of shrinking in him as he did it), and pointed to the partition wall.

The touch roused her. With slow step and vacant face—moving as if she was walking in her sleep—she led the way to the papered wall; knelt down at the skirting-board; and, taking out two small sharp nails, lifted up a long strip of the paper which had been detached from the plaster beneath. Mounting on a chair, she turned back the strip and pinned it up, out of the way, using the two nails, which she had kept ready in her hand.

By the last dim rays of twilight, Geoffrey looked at the wall.

A hollow space met his view. At a distance of some three feet from the floor the laths had been sawn away, and the plaster had been ripped out, piecemeal, so as to leave a cavity, sufficient in height and width to allow free power of working in any direction, to a man's arms. The cavity completely pierced the substance of the wall. Nothing but the paper on the other side prevented eye or hand from penetrating into the next room.

Hester Dethridge got down from the chair, and made signs for a light.

Geoffrey took a match from the box. The same strange uncertainty which had already possessed his feet appeared now to possess his hands. He struck the match too heavily against

the sand-paper, and broke it. He tried another, and struck it too lightly to kindle the flame. Hester took the box out of his hands. Having lighted the candle, she held it low, and pointed to the skirting-board.

Two little hooks were fixed into the floor, near the part of the wall from which the paper had been removed. Two lengths of fine and strong string were twisted once or twice round the hooks. The loose ends of the string, extending to some length beyond the twisted parts, were neatly coiled away against the skirting-board. The other ends, drawn tight, disappeared in two small holes drilled through the wall, at a height of a foot from the floor.

After first untwisting the strings from the hooks, Hester rose, and held the candle so as to light the cavity in the wall. Two more pieces of the fine string were seen here, resting loose upon the uneven surface which marked the lower boundary of the hollowed space. Lifting these higher strings, Hester lifed the loosened paper in the next room—the lower strings, which had previously held the strip firm and flat against the sound portion of the wall, working in their holes, and allowing the paper to move up freely. As it rose higher and higher, Geoffrey saw thin strips of cotton wool lightly attached, at intervals, to the back of the paper, so as effectually to prevent it from making a grating sound against the wall. Up and up it came slowly, till it could be pulled through the hollow space, and pinned up out of the way, as the strip pre-

viously lifted had been pinned before it. Hester drew back, and made way for Geoffrey to look through. There was Anne's room, visible through the wall! He softly parted the light curtains that hung over the bed. There was the pillow, on which her head would rest at night, within reach of his hands!

The deadly dexterity of it struck him cold. His nerves gave way. He drew back with a start of guilty fear and looked round the room. A pocket-flask of brandy lay on the table at his bedside. He snatched it up, and emptied it at a draught—and felt like himself again.

He beckoned to Hester to approach him.

“Before we go any further,” he said, “there's one thing I want to know. How is it all to be put right again? Suppose this room is examined? Those strings will show.”

Hester opened a cupboard and produced a jar. She took out the cork. There was a mixture inside which looked like glue. Partly by signs, and partly by help of the slate, she showed how the mixture could be applied to the back of the loosened strip of paper in the next room—how the paper could be glued to the sound lower part of the wall by tightening the strings—how the strings, having served that purpose, could be safely removed—how the same process could be followed in Geoffrey's room, after the hollowed place had been filled up again with the materials waiting in the scullery, or even without filling up the hollow place if the time failed for doing it. In either case, the refastened paper would

hide everything, and the wall would tell no tales.

Geoffrey was satisfied. He pointed next to the towels in his room.

“Take one of them,” he said, “and show me how you did it, with your own hands.”

As he said the words, Anne’s voice reached his ear from below, calling for “Mrs. Dethridge.”

It was impossible to say what might happen next. In another minute she might go up to her room and discover everything. Geoffrey pointed to the wall.

“Put it right again,” he said. “Instantly!” It was soon done. All that was necessary was to let the two strips of paper drop back into their places—to fasten the strip to the wall in Anne’s room, by tightening the two lower strings—and then to replace the nails which held the loose strip on Geoffrey’s side. In a minute the wall had re-assumed its customary aspect.

They stole out, and looked over the stairs into the passage below. After calling uselessly for the second time, Anne appeared; crossed over to the kitchen; and, returning again with the kettle in her hand, closed the drawing-room door.

Hester Dethridge waited impenetrably to receive her next directions. There were no further directions to give. The hideous dramatic representation of the woman’s crime for which Geoffrey had asked was in no respect necessary: the means were all prepared, and the manner of using them was self-evident. Nothing but the opportunity, and the resolution to profit by it,

were wanting to lead the way to the end. Geoffrey signed to Hester to go downstairs.

“Get back into the kitchen,” he said, “before she comes out again. I shall keep in the garden. When she goes up into her room for the night, show yourself at the back door—and I shall know.”

Hester set her foot on the first stair—stopped—turned round—and looked slowly along the two walls of the passage, from end to end—shuddered—shook her head—and went slowly on down the stairs.

“What were you looking for?” he whispered after her.

She neither answered nor looked back—she went her way into the kitchen.

He waited a minute, and then followed her.

On his way out to the garden, he went into the dining-room. The moon had risen, and the window-shutters were not closed. It was easy to find the brandy and the jug of water on the table. He mixed the two, and emptied the tumbler at a draught. “My head’s queer,” he whispered to himself. He passed his handkerchief over his face. “How infernally hot it is to-night!” He made for the door. It was open, and plainly visible—and yet he failed to find his way to it. Twice he found himself trying to walk through the wall, on either side. The third time he got out, and reached the garden. A strange sensation possessed him, as he walked round and round. He had not drunk enough, or nearly enough, to intoxicate him. His mind,

in a dull way, felt the same as usual; but his body was like the body of a drunken man.

The night advanced; the clock of Putney Church struck ten.

Anne appeared again from the drawing-room, with her bedroom candle in her hand.

“Put out the lights,” she said to Hester, at the kitchen door; “I am going upstairs.”

She entered her room. The insupportable sense of weariness, after the sleepless night that she had passed, weighed more heavily on her than ever. She locked the door, but forbore, on this occasion, to fasten the bolts. The dread of danger was no longer present to her mind; and there was this positive objection to using the bolts, that the unfastening of them would increase the difficulty of leaving the room noiselessly later in the night. She loosened her dress, and lifted her hair from her temples—and paced to and fro in the room wearily, thinking. Geoffrey’s habits were irregular; Hester seldom went to bed early. Two hours at least—more probably three—must pass, before it would be safe to communicate with Sir Patrick by means of the signal in the window. Her strength was fast failing her. If she persisted, for the next three hours, in denying herself the repose which she sorely needed, the chances were that her nerves might fail her, through sheer exhaustion, when the time came for facing the risk and making the effort to escape. Sleep was falling on her even now, and sleep she must have. She had no fear of failing to wake at the needful time.

Falling asleep, with a special necessity for rising at a given hour present to her mind, Anne (like most other sensitively organized people) could trust herself to wake at that given hour, instinctively. She put her lighted candle in a safe position, and laid down on the bed. In less than five minutes she was in a deep sleep.

* * * * *

The church clock struck the quarter to eleven.

Hester Dethridge showed herself at the back garden door. Geoffrey crossed the lawn, and joined her. The light of the lamp in the passage fell on his face. She started back from the sight of it.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

She shook her head, and pointed through the dining-room door to the brandy-bottle on the table.

“I’m as sober as you are, you fool!” he said. “Whatever else it is, it’s not that.”

Hester looked at him again. He was right. However unsteady his gait might be, his speech was not the speech, his eyes were not the eyes, of a drunken man.

“Is she in her room for the night?”

Hester made the affirmative sign.

Geoffrey ascended the stairs, swaying from side to side. He stopped at the top and beckoned to Hester to join him. He went on into his room; and, signing to her to follow him, closed the door.

He looked at the partition wall—without approaching it. Hester waited, behind him.

“Is she asleep?” he asked.

Hester went to the wall; listened at it; and made the affirmative reply.

He sat down. "My head's queer," he said. "Give me a drink of water." He drank part of the water, and poured the rest over his head. Hester turned toward the door to leave him. He instantly stopped her. "*I can't unwind the strings. I can't lift up the paper. Do it.*"

She sternly made the sign of refusal: she resolutely opened the door to leave him. "Do you want your Confession back?" he asked. She closed the door, stolidly submissive in an instant; and crossed to the partition wall.

She lifted the loose strips of paper on either side of the wall—pointed through the hollowed place—and drew back again to the other end of the room.

He rose, and walked unsteadily from the chair to the foot of his bed. Holding by the woodwork of the bed, he waited a little. While he waited, he became conscious of a change in the strange sensations that possessed him. A feeling as of a breath of cold air passed over the right side of his head. He became steady again: he could calculate his distances: he could put his hands through the hollowed place, and draw aside the light curtains, hanging from the hook in the ceiling over the head of her bed. He could look at his sleeping wife.

She was dimly visible, by the light of the candle placed at the other end of her room. The worn and weary look had disappeared from her face. All that had been purest and sweetest in

it, in the by-gone time, seemed to be renewed by the deep sleep that held her gently. She was young again in the dim light: she was beautiful in her calm repose. Her head lay back on the pillow. Her upturned face was in a position which placed her completely at the mercy of the man under whose eyes she was sleeping—the man who was looking at her, with the merciless resolution in him to take her life.

After waiting a while, he drew back. “She’s more like a child than a woman to-night,” he muttered to himself under his breath. He glanced across the room at Hester Dethridge. The lighted candle which she had brought upstairs with her was burning near the place where she stood. “Blow it out,” he whispered. She never moved. He repeated the direction. There she stood, deaf to him.

What was she doing? She was looking fixedly into one of the corners of the room.

He turned his head again toward the hollowed place in the wall. He looked at the peaceful face on the pillow once more. He deliberately revived his own vindictive sense of the debt that he owed her. “But for you,” he whispered to himself, “I should have won the race: but for you, I should have been friends with my father: but for you, I might marry Mrs. Glenarm.” He turned back again into the room while the sense of it was at its fiercest in him. He looked round and round him. He took up a towel; considered for a moment; and threw it down again.

A new idea struck him. In two steps he was

at the side of his bed. He seized on one of the pillows, and looked suddenly at Hester. "It's not a drunken brute this time," he said to her. "It's a woman who will fight for her life. The pillow's the safest of the two." She never answered him, and never looked toward him. He made once more for the place in the wall, and stopped midway between it and his bed—stopped, and cast a backward glance over his shoulder.

Hester Dethridge was stirring at last.

With no third person in the room, she was looking, and moving, nevertheless, as if she was following a third person along the wall, from the corner. Her lips were parted in horror; her eyes, opening wider and wider, stared rigid and glittering at the empty wall. Step by step she stole nearer and nearer to Geoffrey, still following some visionary Thing, which was stealing nearer and nearer too. He asked himself what it meant. Was the terror of the deed that he was about to do more than the woman's brain could bear? Would she burst out screaming, and wake his wife?

He hurried to the place in the wall—to seize the chance, while the chance was his.

He steadied his strong hold on the pillow.

He stooped to pass it through the opening.

He poised it over Anne's sleeping face.

At the same moment he felt Hester Dethridge's hand laid on him from behind. The touch ran through him, from head to foot, like a touch of ice. He drew back with a start, and faced her. Her eyes were staring straight over his shoulder

at something behind him—looking as they had looked in the garden at Windygates.

Before he could speak he felt the flash of her eyes in *his* eyes. For the third time, she had seen the Apparition behind him. The homicidal frenzy possessed her. She flew at his throat like a wild beast. The feeble old woman attacked the athlete!

He dropped the pillow, and lifted his terrible right arm to brush her from him, as he might have brushed an insect from him.

Even as he raised the arm a frightful distortion seized on his face. As if with an invisible hand, it dragged down the brow and the eyelid on the right; it dragged down the mouth on the same side. His arm fell helpless; his whole body, on the side under the arm, gave way. He dropped on the floor, like a man shot dead.

Hester Dethridge pounced on his prostrate body—knelt on his broad breast—and fastened her ten fingers on his throat.

* * * * *

The shock of the fall woke Anne on the instant. She started up—looked round—and saw a gap in the wall at the head of her bed, and the candle-light glimmering in the next room. Panic-stricken; doubting, for the moment, if she were in her right mind, she drew back, waiting—listening—looking. She saw nothing but the glimmering light in the room; she heard nothing but a hoarse gasping, as of some person laboring for breath. The sound ceased. There was an interval of silence. Then the head of Hester Deth-

ridge rose slowly into sight through the gap in the wall—rose with the glittering light of madness in the eyes—and looked at her.

She flew to the open window, and screamed for help. Sir Patrick's voice answered her, from the road in front of the cottage.

“Wait for me, for God's sake!” she cried.

She fled from the room, and rushed down the stairs. In another moment she had opened the door, and was out in the front garden.

As she ran to the gate, she heard the voice of a strange man on the other side of it. Sir Patrick called to her encouragingly. “The policeman is with us,” he said. “He patrols the garden at night—he has a key.” As he spoke the gate was opened from the outside. She saw Sir Patrick, Arnold, and the policeman. She staggered toward them as they came in—she was just able to say, “Upstairs!” before her senses failed her. Sir Patrick saved her from falling. He placed her on the bench in the garden, and waited by her, while Arnold and the policeman hurried into the cottage.

“Where first?” asked Arnold.

“The room the lady called from,” said the policeman.

They mounted the stairs, and entered Anne's room. The gap in the wall was instantly observed by both of them. They looked through it.

Geoffrey Delamayn's dead body lay on the floor. Hester Dethridge was kneeling at his head, praying.

EPILOGUE.

A MORNING CALL.

I.

THE newspapers have announced the return of Lord and Lady Holchester to their residence in London, after an absence on the Continent of more than six months.

It is the height of the season. All day long, within the canonical hours, the door of Holchester House is perpetually opening to receive visitors. The vast majority leave their cards, and go away again. Certain privileged individuals only get out of their carriages and enter the house.

Among these last, arriving at an earlier hour than is customary, is a person of distinction who is positively bent on seeing either the master or the mistress of the house, and who will take no denial. While this person is parleying with the chief of the servants, Lord Holchester, passing from one room to another, happens to cross the inner end of the hall. The person instantly darts at him with a cry of "Dear Lord Holchester!" Julius turns and sees—Lady Lundie!

He is fairly caught, and he gives way with his best grace. As he opens the door of the nearest room for her ladyship, he furtively con-

sults his watch and says, in his inmost soul, "How am I to get rid of her before the others come?"

Lady Lundie settles down on a sofa in a whirlwind of silk and lace, and becomes, in her own majestic way, "perfectly charming." She makes the most affectionate inquiries about Lady Holchester, about the Dowager Lady Holchester, about Julius himself. Where have they been? what have they seen? have time and change helped them to recover the shock of that dreadful event, to which Lady Lundie dare not more particularly allude? Julius answers resignedly and a little absently. He makes polite inquiries, on his side, as to her ladyship's plans and proceedings—with a mind uneasily conscious of the inexorable lapse of time, and of certain probabilities which that lapse may bring with it. Lady Lundie has very little to say about herself. She is only in town for a few weeks. Her life is a life of retirement. "My modest round of duties at Windygates, Lord Holchester; occasionally relieved, when my mind is overworked, by the society of a few earnest friends whose views harmonize with my own—my existence passes (not quite uselessly, I hope) in that way. I have no news; I see nothing—except, indeed, yesterday, a sight of the saddest kind." She pauses there. Julius observes that he is expected to make inquiries, and makes them accordingly.

Lady Lundie hesitates; announces that her news refers to that painful past event which she has already touched on; acknowledges that she

could not find herself in London without feeling an act of duty involved in making inquiries at the asylum in which Hester Dethridge is confined for life; announces that she has not only made the inquiries, but has seen the unhappy woman herself, has spoken to her, has found her unconscious of her dreadful position, incapable of the smallest exertion of memory, resigned to the existence that she leads, and likely (in the opinion of the medical superintendent) to live for some years to come. Having stated these facts, her ladyship is about to make a few of those "remarks appropriate to the occasion," in which she excels, when the door opens; and Lady Holchester, in search of her missing husband, enters the room.

II.

There is a new outburst of affectionate interest on Lady Lundie's part—met civilly, but not cordially, by Lady Holchester. Julius's wife seems, like Julius, to be uneasily conscious of the lapse of time. Like Julius again, she privately wonders how long Lady Lundie is going to stay.

Lady Lundie shows no signs of leaving the sofa. She has evidently come to Holchester House to say something—and she has not said it yet. Is she going to say it? Yes. She is going to get, by a roundabout way, to the object in view. She has another inquiry of the affectionate sort to make. May she be permitted to resume the subject of Lord and Lady Holches-

ter's travels? They have been at Rome. Can they confirm the shocking intelligence which has reached her of the "apostasy" of Mrs. Glenarm?

Lady Holchester can confirm it, by personal experience. Mrs. Glenarm has renounced the world, and has taken refuge in the bosom of the Holy Catholic Church. Lady Holchester has seen her in a convent at Rome. She is passing through the period of her probation; and she is resolved to take the veil. Lady Lundie, as a good Protestant, lifts her hands in horror—declares the topic to be too painful to dwell on—and by way of varying it, goes straight to the point at last. Has Lady Holchester, in the course of her continental experience, happened to meet with, or to hear of—Mrs. Arnold Brinkworth?

"I have ceased, as you know, to hold any communication with my relatives," Lady Lundie explains. "The course they took at the time of our family trial—the sympathy they felt with a Person whom I cannot even now trust myself to name more particularly—alienated us from each other. I may be grieved, dear Lady Holchester, but I bear no malice. And I shall always feel a motherly interest in hearing of Blanche's welfare. I have been told that she and her husband were traveling, at the time when you and Lord Holchester were traveling. Did you meet with them?"

Julius and his wife looked at each other. Lord Holchester is dumb. Lady Holchester replies:

“We saw Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Brinkworth at Florence, and afterward at Naples, Lady Lundie. They returned to England a week since, in anticipation of a certain happy event, which will possibly increase the members of your family circle. They are now in London. Indeed, I may tell you that we expect them here to lunch to-day.”

Having made this plain statement, Lady Holchester looks at Lady Lundie. (If *that* doesn't hasten her departure, nothing will!)

Quite useless! Lady Lundie holds her ground. Having heard absolutely nothing of her relatives for the last six months, she is burning with curiosity to hear more. There is a name she has not mentioned yet. She places a certain constraint upon herself, and mentions it now.

“And Sir Patrick?” says her ladyship, subsiding into a gentle melancholy, suggestive of past injuries condoned by Christian forgiveness. “I only know what report tells me. Did you meet with Sir Patrick at Florence and Naples also?”

Julius and his wife look at each other again. The clock in the hall strikes. Julius shudders. Lady Holchester's patience begins to give way. There is an awkward pause. Somebody must say something. As before, Lady Holchester replies:

“Sir Patrick went abroad, Lady Lundie, with his niece and her husband; and Sir Patrick has come back with them.”

“In good health?” her ladyship inquires.

“Younger than ever,” Lady Holchester rejoins.

Lady Lundie smiles satirically. Lady Holchester notices the smile; decides that mercy shown to *this* woman is mercy misplaced; and announces (to her husband’s horror) that she has news to tell of Sir Patrick, which will probably take his sister-in-law by surprise.

Lady Lundie waits eagerly to hear what the news is.

“It is no secret,” Lady Holchester proceeds—“though it is only known, as yet, to a few intimate friends. Sir Patrick has made an important change in his life.”

Lady Lundie’s charming smile suddenly dies out.

“Sir Patrick is not only a very clever and a very agreeable man,” Lady Holchester resumes, a little maliciously; “he is also, in all his habits and ways (as you well know), a man younger than his years—who still possesses many of the qualities which seldom fail to attract women.”

Lady Lundie starts to her feet.

“You don’t mean to tell me, Lady Holchester, that Sir Patrick is married?”

“I do.”

Her ladyship drops back on the sofa—helpless, really and truly helpless, under the double blow that has fallen on her. She is not only struck out of her place as the chief woman of the family, but (still on the right side of forty) she is socially superannuated, as The Dowager Lady Lundie, for the rest of her life!

“At his age!” she exclaims, as soon as she can speak.

“Pardon me for reminding you,” Lady Holchester answers, “that plenty of men marry at Sir Patrick’s age. In his case, it is only due to him to say that his motive raises him beyond the reach of ridicule or reproach. His marriage is a good action in the highest sense of the word. It does honor to *him*, as well as to the lady who shares his position and his name.”

“A young girl, of course!” is Lady Lundie’s next remark.

“No. A woman who has been tried by no common suffering, and who has borne her hard lot nobly. A woman who deserves the calmer and the happier life on which she is entering now.”

“May I ask who she is?”

Before the question can be answered, a knock at the house-door announces the arrival of visitors. For the third time, Julius and his wife look at each other. On this occasion, Julius interferes.

“My wife has already told you, Lady Lundie, that we expect Mr. and Mrs. Brinkworth to lunch. Sir Patrick and the new Lady Lundie accompany them. If I am mistaken in supposing that it might not be quite agreeable to you to meet them, I can only ask your pardon. If I am right, I will leave Lady Holchester to receive our friends, and will do myself the honor of taking you into another room.”

He advances to the door of an inner room. He

offers his arm to Lady Lundie. Her ladyship stands immovable; determined to see the woman who has supplanted her. In a moment more, the door of entrance from the hall is thrown open; and the servant announces, "Sir Patrick and Lady Lundie. Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Brinkworth."

Lady Lundie looks at the woman who has taken her place at the head of the family; and sees—ANNE SILVESTER!

END OF "MAN AND WIFE."

MISS OR MRS.?

PERSONS OF THE STORY.

SIR JOSEPH GRAYBROOKE	(<i>Knight</i>)
RICHARD TURLINGTON.	(<i>Of the Levant Trade</i>)
LAUNCELOT LINZIE.	(<i>Of the College of Surgeons</i>)
JAMES DICAS.	(<i>Of the Roll of Attorneys</i>)
THOMAS WILDFANG.	(<i>Superannated Seaman</i>)
MISS GRAYBROOKE.	(<i>Sir Joseph's Sister</i>)
NATALIE.	(<i>Sir Joseph's Daughter</i>)
LADY WINWOOD.	(<i>Sir Joseph's Niece</i>)
AMELIA	} (<i>Lady Winwood's Stepdaughters</i>)
SOPHIA	
DOROTHEA	

Period: THE PRESENT TIME. *Place*: ENGLAND.

FIRST SCENE.

AT SEA.

THE night had come to an end. The new-born day waited for its quickening light in the silence that is never known on land—the silence before sunrise, in a calm at sea.

Not a breath came from the dead air. Not a ripple stirred on the motionless water. Nothing changed but the softly-growing light; nothing moved but the lazy mist, curling up to meet the sun, its master, on the eastward sea. By fine gradations, the airy veil of morning thinned in

substance as it rose—thinned, till there dawned through it in the first rays of sunlight the tall white sails of a Schooner Yacht.

From stem to stern silence possessed the vessel—as silence possessed the sea.

But one living creature was on deck—the man at the helm, dozing peaceably with his arm over the useless tiller. Minute by minute the light grew, and the heat grew with it; and still the helmsman slumbered, the heavy sails hung noiseless, the quiet water lay sleeping against the vessel's sides. The whole orb of the sun was visible above the water-line, when the first sound pierced its way through the morning silence. From far off over the shining white ocean, the cry of a sea-bird reached the yacht on a sudden out of the last airy circles of the waning mist.

The sleeper at the helm woke; looked up at the idle sails, and yawned in sympathy with them; looked out at the sea on either side of him, and shook his head obstinately at the superior obstinacy of the calm.

“Blow, my little breeze!” said the man, whistling the sailor's invocation to the wind softly between his teeth. “Blow, my little breeze!”

“How's her head?” cried a bold and brassy voice, hailing the deck from the cabin staircase.

“Anywhere you like, master; all round the compass.”

The voice was followed by the man. The owner of the yacht appeared on deck.

Behold Richard Turlington, Esq., of the great

Levant firm of Pizzituti, Turlington & Branca! Aged eight-and-thirty; standing stiffly and sturdily at a height of not more than five feet six—Mr. Turlington presented to the view of his fellow-creatures a face of the perpendicular order of human architecture. His forehead was a straight line, his upper lip was another, his chin was the straightest and the longest line of all. As he turned his swarthy countenance eastward, and shaded his light gray eyes from the sun, his knotty hand plainly revealed that it had got him his living by its own labor at one time or another in his life. Taken on the whole, this was a man whom it might be easy to respect, but whom it would be hard to love. Better company at the official desk than at the social table. Morally and physically—if the expression may be permitted—a man without a bend in him.

“A calm yesterday,” grumbled Richard Turlington, looking with stubborn deliberation all round him. “And a calm to-day. Ha! next season I’ll have the vessel fitted with engines. I hate this!”

“Think of the filthy coals, and the infernal vibration, and leave your beautiful schooner as she is. We are out for a holiday. Let the wind and the sea take a holiday too.”

Pronouncing those words of remonstrance, a slim, nimble, curly-headed young gentleman joined Richard Turlington on deck, with his clothes under his arm, his towels in his hand, and nothing on him but the night-gown in which he had stepped out of his bed.

“Launcelot Linzie, you have been received on board my vessel in the capacity of medical attendant on Miss Natalie Graybrooke, at her father’s request. Keep your place, if you please. When I want your advice, I’ll ask you for it.” Answering in those terms, the elder man fixed his colorless gray eyes on the younger with an expression which added plainly, “There won’t be room enough in this schooner much longer for me and for you.”

Launcelot Linzie had his reasons (apparently) for declining to let his host offend him on any terms whatever.

“Thank you!” he rejoined, in a tone of satirical good humor. “It isn’t easy to keep my place on board your vessel. I can’t help presuming to enjoy myself as if I was the owner. The life is such a new one—to *me!* It’s so delightfully easy, for instance, to wash yourself here. On shore it’s a complicated question of jugs and basins and tubs; one is always in danger of breaking something, or spoiling something. Here you have only to jump out of bed, to run up on deck, and to do this!”

He turned, and scampered to the bows of the vessel. In one instant he was out of his night-gown, in another he was on the bulwark, in a third he was gamboling luxuriously in sixty fathoms of salt-water.

Turlington’s eyes followed him with a reluctant, uneasy attention as he swam round the vessel, the only moving object in view. Turlington’s mind, steady and slow in all its operations,

set him a problem to be solved, on given conditions, as follows:

“Launcelot Linzie is fifteen years younger than I am. Add to that, Launcelot Linzie is Natalie Graybrooke’s cousin. Given those two advantages—Query: Has he taken Natalie’s fancy?”

Turning that question slowly over and over in his mind, Richard Turlington seated himself in a corner at the stern of the vessel. He was still at work on the problem, when the young surgeon returned to his cabin to put the finishing touches to his toilet. He had not reached the solution when the steward appeared an hour later and said, “Breakfast is ready, sir!”

They were a party of five round the cabin table.

First, Sir Joseph Graybrooke. Inheritor of a handsome fortune made by his father and his grandfather in trade. Mayor, twice elected, of a thriving provincial town. Officially privileged, while holding that dignity, to hand a silver trowel to a royal personage condescending to lay a first stone of a charitable edifice. Knighted, accordingly, in honor of the occasion. Worthy of the honor and worthy of the occasion. A type of his eminently respectable class. Possessed of an amiable, rosy face, and soft, silky white hair. Sound in his principles; tidy in his dress; blessed with moderate politics and a good digestion—a harmless, healthy, spruce, speckless, weak-minded old man.

Secondly, Miss Lavinia Graybrooke, Sir Jo-

seph's maiden sister. Personally, Sir Joseph in petticoats. If you knew one you knew the other.

Thirdly, Miss Natalie Graybrooke—Sir Joseph's only child.

She had inherited the personal appearance and the temperament of her mother—dead many years since. There had been a mixture of Negro blood and French blood in the late Lady Graybrooke's family, settled originally in Martinique. Natalie had her mother's warm dusky color, her mother's superb black hair, and her mother's melting, lazy, lovely brown eyes. At fifteen years of age (dating from her last birthday) she possessed the development of the bosom and limbs which in England is rarely attained before twenty. Everything about the girl—except her little rosy ears—was on a grand Amazonian scale. Her shapely hand was long and large; her supple waist was the waist of a woman. The indolent grace of all her movements had its motive power in an almost masculine firmness of action and profusion of physical resource. This remarkable bodily development was far from being accompanied by any corresponding development of character. Natalie's manner was the gentle, innocent manner of a young girl. She had her father's sweet temper ingrafted on her mother's variable Southern nature. She moved like a goddess, and she laughed like a child. Signs of maturing too rapidly—of outgrowing her strength, as the phrase went—had made their appearance in Sir Joseph's daughter during the spring. The family doctor had suggested a

sea-voyage, as a wise manner of employing the fine summer months. Richard Turlington's yacht was placed at her disposal, with Richard Turlington himself included as one of the fixtures of the vessel. With her father and her aunt to keep up round her the atmosphere of home—with Cousin Launcelot (more commonly known as "Launce") to carry out, if necessary, the medical treatment prescribed by superior authority on shore—the lovely invalid embarked on her summer cruise, and sprang up into a new existence in the life-giving breezes of the sea. After two happy months of lazy coasting round the shores of England, all that remained of Natalie's illness was represented by a delicious languor in her eyes, and an utter inability to devote herself to anything which took the shape of a serious occupation. As she sat at the cabin breakfast-table that morning, in her quaintly-made sailing dress of old-fashioned nankeen—her inbred childishness of manner contrasting delightfully with the blooming maturity of her form—the man must have been trebly armed indeed in the modern philosophy who could have denied that the first of a woman's rights is the right of being beautiful; and the foremost of a woman's merits, the merit of being young!

The other two persons present at the table were the two gentlemen who have already appeared on the deck of the yacht.

"Not a breath of wind stirring!" said Richard Turlington. "The weather has got a grudge against us. We have drifted about four or five

miles in the last eight-and-forty hours. You will never take another cruise with me—you must be longing to get on shore.”

He addressed himself to Natalie; plainly eager to make himself agreeable to the young lady—and plainly unsuccessful in producing any impression on her. She made a civil answer; and looked at her tea-cup, instead of looking at Richard Turlington.

“You might fancy yourself on shore at this moment,” said Launce. “The vessel is as steady as a house, and the swing-table we are eating our breakfast on is as even as your dining-room table at home.”

He too addressed himself to Natalie, but without betraying the anxiety to please her which had been shown by the other. For all that, *he* diverted the girl’s attention from her tea-cup; and *his* idea instantly awakened a responsive idea in Natalie’s mind.

“It will be so strange on shore,” she said, “to find myself in a room that never turns on one side, and to sit at a table that never tilts down to my knees at one time, or rises up to my chin at another. How I shall miss the wash of the water at my ear, and the ring of the bell on deck, when I am awake at night on land! No interest there in how the wind blows, or how the sails are set. No asking your way of the sun, when you are lost, with a little brass instrument and a morsel of pencil and paper. No delightful wandering wherever the wind takes you, without the worry of planning beforehand where you

are to go. Oh how I shall miss the dear, changeable, inconstant sea! And how sorry I am I'm not a man and a sailor!"

This to the guest admitted on board on sufferance, and not one word of it addressed, even by chance, to the owner of the yacht!

Richard Turlington's heavy eyebrows contracted with an unmistakable expression of pain.

"If this calm weather holds," he went on, addressing himself to Sir Joseph, "I am afraid, Graybrooke, I shall not be able to bring you back to the port we sailed from by the end of the week."

"Whenever you like, Richard," answered the old gentleman, resignedly. "Any time will do for me."

"Any time within reasonable limits, Joseph," said Miss Lavinia, evidently feeling that her brother was conceding too much. She spoke with Sir Joseph's amiable smile and Sir Joseph's softly-pitched voice. Two twin babies could hardly have been more like one another.

While these few words were being exchanged among the elders, a private communication was in course of progress between the two young people under the cabin table. Natalie's smartly-slipped foot felt its way cautiously inch by inch over the carpet till it touched Launce's boot. Launce, devouring his breakfast, instantly looked up from his plate, and then, at a second touch from Natalie, looked down again in a violent hurry. After pausing to make sure that she was not noticed, Natalie took up her knife.

Under a perfectly-acted pretense of toying with it absently, in the character of a young lady absorbed in thought, she began dividing a morsel of ham left on the edge of her plate, into six tiny pieces. Launce's eye looked in sidelong expectation at the divided and subdivided ham. He was evidently waiting to see the collection of morsels put to some telegraphic use, previously determined on between his neighbor and himself.

In the meanwhile the talk proceeded among the other persons at the breakfast-table. Miss Lavinia addressed herself to Launce.

"Do you know, you careless boy, you gave me a fright this morning? I was sleeping with my cabin window open, and I was awoke by an awful splash in the water. I called for the stewardess. I declare I thought somebody had fallen overboard!"

Sir Joseph looked up briskly; his sister had accidentally touched on an old association.

"Talk of falling overboard," he began, "reminds me of an extraordinary adventure—"

There Launce broke in, making his apologies.

"It shan't occur again, Miss Lavinia," he said. "To-morrow morning I'll oil myself all over, and slip into the water as silently as a seal."

"Of an extraordinary adventure," persisted Sir Joseph, "which happened to me many years ago, when I was a young man. Lavinia?"

He stopped, and looked interrogatively at his sister. Miss Graybrooke nodded her head re-

sponsively, and settled herself in her chair, as if summoning her attention in anticipation of a coming demand on it. To persons well acquainted with the brother and sister these proceedings were ominous of an impending narrative, protracted to a formidable length. The two always told a story in couples, and always differed with each other about the facts, the sister politely contradicting the brother when it was Sir Joseph's story, and the brother politely contradicting the sister when it was Miss Lavinia's story. Separated one from the other, and thus relieved of their own habitual interchange of contradiction, neither of them had ever been known to attempt the relation of the simplest series of events without breaking down.

"It was five years before I knew you, Richard," proceeded Sir Joseph.

"Six years," said Miss Graybrooke.

"Excuse me, Lavinia."

"No, Joseph, I have it down in my diary."

"Let us waive the point." (Sir Joseph invariably used this formula as a means of at once conciliating his sister, and getting a fresh start for his story.) "I was cruising off the Mersey in a Liverpool pilot-boat. I had hired the boat in company with a friend of mine, formerly notorious in London society, under the nickname (derived from the peculiar brown color of his whiskers) of 'Mahogany Dobbs.' "

"The color of his liveries, Joseph, not the color of his whiskers."

"My dear Lavinia, you are thinking of 'Sea-

green Shaw,' so called from the extraordinary liveries he adopted for his servants in the year when he was sheriff."

"I think not, Joseph."

"I beg your pardon, Lavinia."

Richard Turlington's knotty fingers drummed impatiently on the table. He looked toward Natalie. She was idly arranging her little morsels of ham in a pattern on her plate. Launcelot Linzie, still more idly, was looking at the pattern. Seeing what he saw now, Richard solved the problem which had puzzled him on deck. It was simply impossible that Natalie's fancy could be really taken by such an empty-headed fool as that!

Sir Joseph went on with his story:

"We were some ten or a dozen miles off the mouth of the Mersey—"

"Nautical miles, Joseph."

"It doesn't matter, Lavinia."

"Excuse me, brother, the late great and good Doctor Johnson said accuracy ought always to be studied even in the most trifling things."

"They were common miles, Lavinia."

"They were nautical miles, Joseph."

"Let us waive the point. Mahogany Dobbs and I happened to be below in the cabin, occupied—"

Here Sir Joseph paused (with his amiable smile) to consult his memory. Miss Lavinia waited (with *her* amiable smile) for the coming opportunity of setting her brother right. At the same moment Natalie laid down her knife and

softly touched Launce under the table. When she thus claimed his attention the six pieces of ham were arranged as follows in her plate: Two pieces were placed opposite each other, and four pieces were ranged perpendicularly under them. Launce looked, and twice touched Natalie under the table. Interpreted by the Code agreed on between the two, the signal in the plate meant, "I must see you in private." And Launce's double touch answered, "After breakfast."

Sir Joseph proceeded with his story. Natalie took up her knife again. Another signal coming!

"We were both down in the cabin, occupied in finishing our dinner—"

"Just sitting down to lunch, Joseph."

"My dear! I ought to know."

"I only repeat what I heard, brother. The last time you told the story, you and your friend were sitting down to lunch."

"We won't particularize, Lavinia. Suppose we say occupied over a meal?"

"If it is of no more importance than that, Joseph, it would be surely better to leave it out altogether."

"Let us waive the point. Well, we were suddenly alarmed by a shout on deck, 'Man overboard!' We both rushed up the cabin stairs, naturally under the impression that one of our crew had fallen into the sea: an impression shared, I ought to add, by the man at the helm, who had given the alarm."

Sir Joseph paused again. He was approach-

ing one of the great dramatic points in his story, and was naturally anxious to present it as impressively as possible. He considered with himself, with his head a little on one side. Miss Lavinia considered with *herself*, with *her* head a little on one side. Natalie laid down her knife again, and again touched Launce under the table. This time there were five pieces of ham ranged longitudinally on the plate, with one piece immediately under them at the center of the line. Interpreted by the Code, this signal indicated two ominous words, "Bad news." Launce looked significantly at the owner of the yacht (meaning of the look, "Is he at the bottom of it?"). Natalie frowned in reply (meaning of the frown, "Yes, he is"). Launce looked down again into the plate. Natalie instantly pushed all the pieces of ham together in a little heap (meaning of the heap, "No more to say").

"Well?" said Richard Turlington, turning sharply on Sir Joseph. "Get on with your story. What next?"

Thus far he had not troubled himself to show even a decent pretense of interest in his old friend's perpetually-interrupted narrative. It was only when Sir Joseph had reached his last sentence—intimating that the man overboard might turn out in course of time not to be a man of the pilot-boat's crew—it was only then that Turlington sat up in his chair, and showed signs of suddenly feeling a strong interest in the progress of the story.

Sir Joseph went on:

“As soon as we got on deck, we saw the man in the water, astern. Our vessel was hove up in the wind, and the boat was lowered. The master and one of the men took the oars. All told, our crew were seven in number. Two away in the boat, a third at the helm, and, to my amazement, when I looked round, the other four behind me making our number complete. At the same moment Mahogany Dobbs, who was looking through a telescope, called out, ‘Who the devil can he be? The man is floating on a hen-coop, and we have got nothing of the sort on board this pilot-boat.’”

The one person present who happened to notice Richard Turlington’s face when those words were pronounced was Launcelot Linzie. He—and he alone—saw the Levant trader’s swarthy complexion fade slowly to a livid ashen gray; his eyes the while fixing themselves on Sir Joseph Graybrooke with a furtive glare in them like the glare in the eyes of a wild beast. Apparently conscious that Launce was looking at him—though he never turned his head Launce’s way—he laid his elbow on the table, lifted his arm, and so rested his face on his hand, while the story went on, as to screen it effectually from the young surgeon’s view.

“The man was brought on board,” proceeded Sir Joseph, “sure enough, with a hen-coop—on which he had been found floating. The poor wretch was blue with terror and exposure in the water; he fainted when we lifted him on deck. When he came to himself he told us a horrible

story. He was a sick and destitute foreign seaman, and he had hidden himself in the hold of an English vessel (bound to a port in his native country) which had sailed from Liverpool that morning. He had been discovered, and brought before the captain. The captain, a monster in human form, if ever there was one yet—”

Before the next word of the sentence could pass Sir Joseph's lips, Turlington startled the little party in the cabin by springing suddenly to his feet.

“The breeze!” he cried; “the breeze at last!”

As he spoke, he wheeled round to the cabin door so as to turn his back on his guests, and hailed the deck.

“Which way is the wind?”

“There is not a breath of wind, sir.”

Not the slightest movement in the vessel had been perceptible in the cabin; not a sound had been audible indicating the rising of the breeze. The owner of the yacht—accustomed to the sea, capable, if necessary, of sailing his own vessel—had surely committed a strange mistake! He turned again to his friends, and made his apologies with an excess of polite regret far from characteristic of him at other times and under other circumstances.

“Go on,” he said to Sir Joseph, when he had got to the end of his excuses; “I never heard such an interesting story in my life. Pray go on!”

The request was not an easy one to comply with. Sir Joseph's ideas had been thrown into

confusion. Miss Lavinia's contradictions (held in reserve) had been scattered beyond recall. Both brother and sister were, moreover, additionally hindered in recovering the control of their own resources by the look and manner of their host. He alarmed, instead of encouraging the two harmless old people, by fronting them almost fiercely, with his elbows squared on the table, and his face expressive of a dogged resolution to sit there and listen, if need be, for the rest of his life. Launce was the person who set Sir Joseph going again. After first looking attentively at Richard, he took his uncle straight back to the story by means of a question, thus:

“You don't mean to say that the captain of the ship threw the man overboard?”

“That is just what he did, Launce. The poor wretch was too ill to work his passage. The captain declared he would have no idle foreign vagabond in his ship to eat up the provisions of Englishmen who worked. With his own hands he cast the hen-coop into the water, and (assisted by one of his sailors) he threw the man after it, and told him to float back to Liverpool with the evening tide.”

“A lie!” cried Turlington, addressing himself, not to Sir Joseph, but to Launce.

“Are you acquainted with the circumstances?” asked Launce, quietly.

“I know nothing about the circumstances. I say, from my own experience, that foreign sailors are even greater blackguards than English sailors. The man had met with an accident, no

doubt. The rest of his story was a lie, and the object of it was to open Sir Joseph's purse."

Sir Joseph mildly shook his head.

"No lie, Richard. Witnesses proved that the man had spoken the truth."

"Witnesses? Pooh! More liars, you mean."

"I went to the owners of the vessel," pursued Sir Joseph. "I got from them the names of the officers and the crew, and I waited, leaving the case in the hands of the Liverpool police. The ship was wrecked at the mouth of the Amazon, but the crew and the cargo were saved. The men belonging to Liverpool came back. They were a bad set, I grant you. But they were examined separately about the treatment of the foreign sailor, and they all told the same story. They could give no account of their captain, nor of the sailor who had been his accomplice in the crime, except that they had not embarked in the ship which brought the rest of the crew to England. Whatever may have become of the captain since, he certainly never returned to Liverpool."

"Did you find out his name?"

The question was asked by Turlington. Even Sir Joseph, the least observant of men, noticed that it was put with a perfectly unaccountable irritability of manner.

"Don't be angry, Richard," said the old gentleman. "What is there to be angry about?"

"I don't know what you mean. I'm not angry—I'm only curious. *Did* you find out who he was?"

“I did. His name was Goward. He was well known at Liverpool as a very clever and a very dangerous man. Quite young at the time I am speaking of, and a first-rate sailor; famous for taking command of unseaworthy ships and vagabond crews. Report described him to me as having made considerable sums of money in that way, for a man in his position; serving firms, you know, with a bad name, and running all sorts of desperate risks. A sad ruffian, Richard! More than once in trouble, on both sides of the Atlantic, for acts of violence and cruelty. Dead, I dare say, long since.”

“Or possibly,” said Launce, “alive, under another name, and thriving in a new way of life, with more desperate risks in it, of some other sort.”

“Are *you* acquainted with the circumstances?” asked Turlington, retorting Launce’s question on him, with a harsh ring of defiance in his brassy voice.

“What became of the poor foreign sailor, papa?” said Natalie, purposely interrupting Launce before he could meet the question angrily asked of him, by an angry reply.

“We made a subscription, and spoke to his consul, my dear. He went back to his country, poor fellow, comfortably enough.”

“And there is an end of Sir Joseph’s story,” said Turlington, rising noisily from his chair. “It’s a pity we haven’t got a literary man on board—he would make a novel of it.” He looked up at the skylight as he got on his feet.

“Here is the breeze, this time,” he exclaimed, “and no mistake!”

It was true. At last the breeze had come. The sails flapped, the main boom swung over with a thump, and the stagnant water, stirred at last, bubbled merrily past the vessel’s sides.

“Come on deck, Natalie, and get some fresh air,” said Miss Lavinia, leading the way to the cabin door.

Natalie held up the skirt of her nankeen dress, and exhibited the purple trimming torn away over an extent of some yards.

“Give me half an hour first, aunt, in my cabin,” she said, “to mend this.”

Miss Lavinia elevated her venerable eyebrows in amazement.

“You have done nothing but tear your dresses, my dear, since you have been in Mr. Turlington’s yacht. Most extraordinary! I have torn none of mine during the whole cruise.”

Natalie’s dark color deepened a shade. She laughed, a little uneasily. “I am so awkward on board ship,” she replied, and turned away and shut herself up in her cabin.

Richard Turlington produced his case of cigars.

“Now is the time,” he said to Sir Joseph, “for the best cigar of the day—the cigar after breakfast. Come on deck.”

“You will join us, Launce?” said Sir Joseph.

“Give me half an hour first over my books,” Launce replied. “I mustn’t let my medical knowledge get musty at sea, and I might not feel inclined to study later in the day.”

“Quite right, my dear boy, quite right.”

Sir Joseph patted his nephew approvingly on the shoulder. Launce turned away on *his* side, and shut himself up in his cabin.

The other three ascended together to the deck.

SECOND SCENE.

THE STORE-ROOM.

PERSONS possessed of sluggish livers and tender hearts find two serious drawbacks to the enjoyment of a cruise at sea. It is exceedingly difficult to get enough walking exercise; and it is next to impossible (where secrecy is an object) to make love without being found out. Reverting for the moment to the latter difficulty only, life within the narrow and populous limits of a vessel may be defined as essentially life in public. From morning to night you are in your neighbor's way, or your neighbor is in your way. As a necessary result of these conditions, the rarest of existing men may be defined as the man who is capable of stealing a kiss at sea without discovery. An inbred capacity for stratagem of the finest sort; inexhaustible inventive resources; patience which can flourish under superhuman trials; presence of mind which can keep its balance victoriously under every possible stress of emergency—these are some of the qualifications which must accompany Love on a cruise, when Love embarks in

the character of a contraband commodity not duly entered on the papers of the ship.

Having established a Code of Signals which enabled them to communicate privately, while the eyes and ears of others were wide open on every side of them, Natalie and Launce were next confronted by the more serious difficulty of finding a means of meeting together at stolen interviews on board the yacht. Possessing none of those precious moral qualifications already enumerated as the qualifications of an accomplished lover at sea, Launce had proved unequal to grapple with the obstacles in his way. Left to her own inventive resources, Natalie had first suggested the young surgeon's medical studies as Launce's unanswerable excuse for shutting himself up at intervals in the lower regions, and had then hit on the happy idea of tearing her trimmings, and condemning herself to repair her own carelessness, as the all-sufficient reason for similar acts of self-seclusion on her side. In this way the lovers contrived, while the innocent ruling authorities were on deck, to meet privately below them, on the neutral ground of the main cabin; and there, by previous arrangement at the breakfast-table, they were about to meet privately now.

Natalie's door was, as usual on these occasions, the first that opened; for this sound reason, that Natalie's quickness was the quickness to be depended on in case of accident.

She looked up at the sky-light. There were the legs of the two gentlemen and the skirts of

her aunt visible (and stationary) on the lee side of the deck. She advanced a few steps and listened. There was a pause in the murmur of the voices above. She looked up again. One pair of legs (not her father's) had disappeared. Without an instant's hesitation, Natalie darted back to her own door, just in time to escape Richard Turlington descending the cabin stairs. All he did was to go to one of the drawers under the main-cabin book-case and to take out a map, ascending again immediately to the deck. Natalie's guilty conscience rushed instantly, nevertheless, to the conclusion that Richard suspected her. When she showed herself for the second time, instead of venturing into the cabin, she called across it in a whisper,

“Launce!”

Launce appeared at his door. He was peremptorily checked before he could cross the threshold.

“Don't stir a step! Richard has been down in the cabin! Richard suspects us!”

“Nonsense! Come out.”

“Nothing will induce me, unless you can find some other place than the cabin.”

Some other place? How easy to find it on land! How apparently impossible at sea! There was the fore-castle (full of men) at one end of the vessel. There was the sail-room (full of sails) at the other. There was the ladies' cabin (used as the ladies' dressing-room; inaccessible, in that capacity, to every male human being on board). Was there any disposable inclosed space to be found amidships? On one side there were

the sleeping berths of the sailing-master and his mate (impossible to borrow *them*). On the other side was the steward's store-room. Launce considered for a moment. The steward's store-room was just the thing!

"Where are you going?" asked Natalie, as her lover made straight for a closed door at the lower extremity of the main cabin.

"To speak to the steward, darling. Wait one moment, and you will see me again."

Launce opened the store-room door, and discovered, not the steward, but his wife, who occupied the situation of stewardess on board the vessel. The accident was, in this case, a lucky one. Having stolen several kisses at sea, and having been discovered (in every case) either by the steward or his wife, Launce felt no difficulty in prefacing his request to be allowed the use of the room by the plainest allusion to his relations with Natalie. He could count on the silence of the sympathizing authorities in this region of the vessel, having wisely secured them as accomplices by the usual persuasion of the pecuniary sort. Of the two, however, the stewardess, as a woman, was the more likely to lend a ready ear to Launce's entreaties in his present emergency. After a faint show of resistance, she consented, not only to leave the room, but to keep her husband out of it, on the understanding that it was not to be occupied for more than ten minutes. Launce made the signal to Natalie at one door, while the stewardess went out by the other. In a moment more the lovers

were united in a private room. Is it necessary to say in what language the proceedings were opened? Surely not! There is an inarticulate language of the lips in use on these occasions in which we are all proficient, though we sometimes forget it in later life. Natalie seated herself on a locker. The tea, sugar, and spices were at her back, a side of bacon swung over her head, and a net full of lemons dangled before her face. It might not be roomy, but it was snug and comfortable.

“Suppose they call for the steward?” she suggested. (“Don’t, Launce!”)

“Never mind. We shall be safe enough if they do. The steward has only to show himself on deck, and they will suspect nothing.”

“Do be quiet, Launce! I have got dreadful news to tell you. And, besides, my aunt will expect to see me with my braid sewn on again.”

She had brought her needle and thread with her. Whipping up the skirt of her dress on her knee, she bent forward over it, and set herself industriously to the repair of the torn trimming. In this position her lithe figure showed charmingly its firm yet easy line. The needle, in her dexterous brown fingers, flew through its work. The locker was a broad one; Launce was able to seat himself partially behind her. In this position who could have resisted the temptation to lift up her great knot of broadly-plaited black hair, and to let the warm, dusky nape of her neck disclose itself to view? Who, looking at it, could fail to revile the senseless modern fash-

ion of dressing the hair, which hides the double beauty of form and color that nestles at the back of a woman's neck? From time to time, as the interview proceeded, Launce's lips emphasized the more important words occurring in his share of the conversation on the soft, fragrant skin which the lifted hair let him see at intervals. In Launce's place, sir, you would have done it too.

"Now, Natalie, what is the news?"

"He has spoken to papa, Launce."

"Richard Turlington?"

"Yes."

"D—n him!"

Natalie started. A curse addressed to the back of your neck, instantly followed by a blessing in the shape of a kiss, *is* a little trying when you are not prepared for it.

"Don't do that again, Launce! It was while you were on deck smoking, and when I was supposed to be fast asleep. I opened the ventilator in my cabin door, dear, and I heard every word they said. He waited till my aunt was out of the way, and he had got papa all to himself, and then he began it in that horrible, downright voice of his—'Graybrooke! how much longer am I to wait?' "

"Did he say that?"

"No more swearing, Launce! Those were the words. Papa didn't understand them. He only said (poor dear!)—'Bless my soul, Richard, what do you want?' Richard soon explained himself. 'Who could he be waiting for—but

Me?' Papa said something about my being so young. Richard stopped his mouth directly. 'Girls were like fruit; some ripened soon, and some ripened late. Some were women at twenty, and some were women at sixteen. It was impossible to look at me, and not see that I was like a new being after my two months at sea,' and so on and so on. Papa behaved like an angel. He still tried to put it off. 'Plenty of time, Richard, plenty of time.' 'Plenty of time for *her*' (was the wretch's answer to that); 'but not for *me*. Think of all I have to offer her' (as if I cared for his money!); 'think how long I have looked upon her as growing up to be my wife' (growing up for *him*—monstrous!), 'and don't keep me in a state of uncertainty, which it gets harder and harder for a man in my position to endure!' He was really quite eloquent. His voice trembled. There is no doubt, dear, that he is very, very fond of me."

"And you feel flattered by it, of course?"

"Don't talk nonsense. I feel a little frightened at it, I can tell you."

"Frightened? Did *you* notice him this morning?"

"I? When?"

"When your father was telling that story about the man overboard."

"No. What did he do? Tell me, Launce."

"I'll tell you directly. How did it all end last night? Did your father make any sort of promise?"

"You know Richard's way; Richard left him

no other choice. Papa had to promise before he was allowed to go to bed."

"To let Turlington marry you?"

"Yes; the week after my next birthday."

"The week after next Christmas-day?"

"Yes. Papa is to speak to me as soon as we are at home again, and my married life is to begin with the New Year."

"Are you in earnest, Natalie? Do you really mean to say it has gone as far as that?"

"They have settled everything. The splendid establishment we are to set up, the great income we are to have. I heard papa tell Richard that half his fortune should go to me on my wedding-day. It was sickening to hear how much they made of Money, and how little they thought of Love. What am I to do, Launce?"

"That's easily answered, my darling. In the first place, you are to make up your mind not to marry Richard Turlington—"

"Do talk reasonably. You know I have done all I could. I have told papa that I can think of Richard as a friend, but not as a husband. He only laughs at me, and says, 'Wait a little, and you will alter your opinion, my dear.' You see Richard is everything to him; Richard has always managed his affairs, and has saved him from losing by bad speculations; Richard has known me from the time when I was a child; Richard has a splendid business, and quantities of money. Papa can't even imagine that I can resist Richard. I have tried my aunt; I have told her he is too old for me. All she says is,

‘Look at your father; he was much older than your mother, and what a happy marriage theirs was.’ Even if I said in so many words, ‘I won’t marry Richard,’ what good would it do to *us*? Papa is the best and dearest old man in the world; but oh, he is so fond of money! He believes in nothing else. He would be furious—yes, kind as he is, he would be furious—if I even hinted that I was fond of *you*. Any man who proposed to marry me—if he couldn’t match the fortune that I should bring him by a fortune of his own—would be a lunatic in papa’s eyes. He wouldn’t think it necessary to answer him; he would ring the bell, and have him shown out of the house. I am exaggerating nothing, Launce; you know I am speaking the truth. There is no hope in the future—that I can see—for either of us.”

“Have you done, Natalie? I have something to say on my side if you have.”

“What is it?”

“If things go on as they are going on now, shall I tell you how it will end? It will end in your being Turlington’s wife.”

“Never!”

“So you say now; but you don’t know what may happen between this and Christmas-day. Natalie, there is only one way of making sure that you will never marry Richard. Marry *me*.”

“Without papa’s consent?”

“Without saying a word to anybody till it’s done.”

“Oh, Launce! Launce!”

“My darling, every word you have said proves there is no other way. Think of it, Natalie, think of it.”

There was a pause. Natalie dropped her needle and thread, and hid her face in her hands. “If my poor mother was only alive,” she said; “if I only had an elder sister to advise me, and to take my part.”

She was evidently hesitating. Launce took a man’s advantage of her indecision. He pressed her without mercy.

“Do you love me?” he whispered, with his lips close to her ear.

“You know I do, dearly.”

“Put it out of Richard’s power to part us, Natalie.”

“Part us? We are cousins: we have known each other since we were both children. Even if he proposed parting us, papa wouldn’t allow it.”

“Mark my words, he *will* propose it. As for your father, Richard has only to lift his finger and your father obeys him. My love, the happiness of both our lives is at stake.” He wound his arm round her, and gently drew her head back on his bosom. “Other girls have done it, darling,” he pleaded, “why shouldn’t you?”

The effort to answer him was too much for her. She gave it up. A low sigh fluttered through her lips. She nestled closer to him, and faintly closed her eyes. The next instant she started up, trembling from head to foot, and looked at the sky-light. Richard Turlington’s

voice was suddenly audible on deck exactly above them.

“Graybrooke, I want to say a word to you about Launcelot Linzie.”

Natalie’s first impulse was to fly to the door. Hearing Launce’s name on Richard’s lips, she checked herself. Something in Richard’s tone roused in her the curiosity which suspends fear. She waited, with her hand in Launce’s hand.

“If you remember,” the brassy voice went on, “I doubted the wisdom of taking him with us on this cruise. You didn’t agree with me, and, at your express request, I gave way. I did wrong. Launcelot Linzie is a very presuming young man.”

Sir Joseph’s answer was accompanied by Sir Joseph’s mellow laugh.

“My dear Richard! Surely you are a little hard on Launce?”

“You are not an observant man, Graybrooke. I am. I see signs of his presuming with all of us, and especially with Natalie. I don’t like the manner in which he speaks to her and looks at her. He is unduly familiar; he is insolently confidential. There must be a stop put to it. In my position, my feelings ought to be regarded. I request you to check the intimacy when we get on shore.”

Sir Joseph’s next words were spoken more seriously. He expressed his surprise.

“My dear Richard, they are cousins, they have been playmates from childhood. How *can* you

think of attaching the slightest importance to anything that is said or done by poor Launce?"

There was a good-humored contempt in Sir Joseph's reference to "poor Launce" which jarred on his daughter. He might almost have been alluding to some harmless domestic animal. Natalie's color deepened. Her hand pressed Launce's hand gently.

Turlington still persisted.

"I must once more request—seriously request—that you will check this growing intimacy. I don't object to your asking him to the house when you ask other friends. I only wish you (and expect you) to stop his 'dropping in,' as it is called, at any hour of the day or evening when he may have nothing to do. Is that understood between us?"

"If you make a point of it, Richard, of course it's understood between us."

Launce looked at Natalie, as weak Sir Joseph consented in those words.

"What did I tell you?" he whispered.

Natalie hung her head in silence. There was a pause in the conversation on deck. The two gentlemen walked away slowly toward the forward part of the vessel.

Launce pursued his advantage.

"Your father leaves us no alternative," he said. "The door will be closed against me as soon as we get on shore. If I lose you, Natalie, I don't care what becomes of me. My profession may go to the devil. I have nothing left worth living for."

“Hush! hush! don’t talk in that way!”

Launce tried the soothing influence of persuasion once more.

“Hundreds and hundreds of people in our situation have married privately—and have been forgiven afterward,” he went on. “I won’t ask you to do anything in a hurry. I will be guided entirely by your wishes. All I want to quiet my mind is to know that you are mine. Do, do, do make me feel sure that Richard Turlington can’t take you away from me.”

“Don’t press me, Launce.” She dropped on the locker. “See!” she said. “It makes me tremble only to think of it!”

“Who are you afraid of, darling? Not your father, surely?”

“Poor papa! I wonder whether he would be hard on me for the first time in his life?” She stopped; her moistening eyes looked up imploringly in Launce’s face. “Don’t press me!” she repeated faintly. “You know it’s wrong. We should have to confess it—and then what would happen?” She paused again. Her eyes wandered nervously to the deck. Her voice dropped to its lowest tones. “Think of Richard!” she said, and shuddered at the terrors which that name conjured up. Before it was possible to say a quieting word to her, she was again on her feet. Richard’s name had suddenly recalled to her memory Launce’s mysterious allusion, at the outset of the interview, to the owner of the yacht. “What was that you said about Richard just now?” she asked. “You saw something

(or heard something) strange while papa was telling his story. What was it?"

"I noticed Richard's face, Natalie, when your father told us that the man overboard was not one of the pilot-boat's crew. He turned ghastly pale. He looked guilty—"

"Guilty? Of what?"

"He was present—I am certain of it—when the sailor was thrown into the sea. For all I know, he may have been the man who did it."

Natalie started back in horror.

"Oh, Launce! Launce! that is too bad. You may not like Richard—you may treat Richard as your enemy. But to say such a horrible thing of him as that— It's not generous. It's not like *you*."

"If you had seen him, you would have said it too. I mean to make inquiries—in your father's interests as well as in ours. My brother knows one of the Commissioners of Police, and my brother can get it done for me. Turlington has not always been in the Levant trade—I know that already."

"For shame, Launce! for shame!"

The footsteps on deck were audible coming back. Natalie sprang to the door leading into the cabin. Launce stopped her, as she laid her hand on the lock. The footsteps went straight on toward the stern of the vessel. Launce clasped both arms round her. Natalie gave way.

"Don't drive me to despair!" he said. "This is my last opportunity. I don't ask you to say

at once that you will marry me, I only ask you to think of it. My darling! my angel! will you think of it?"

As he put the question, they might have heard (if they had not been too completely engrossed in each other to listen) the footsteps returning—one pair of footsteps only this time. Natalie's prolonged absence had begun to surprise her aunt, and had roused a certain vague distrust in Richard's mind. He walked back again along the deck by himself. He looked absently in the main cabin as he passed it. The store-room skylight came next. In his present frame of mind, would he look absently into the store-room too?

"Let me go!" said Natalie.

Launce only answered, "Say yes," and held her as if he would never let her go again.

At the same moment Miss Lavinia's voice rose shrill from the deck calling for Natalie. There was but one way of getting free from him. She said, "I'll think of it." Upon that, he kissed her and let her go.

The door had barely closed on her when the lowering face of Richard Turlington appeared on a level with the side of the sky-light, looking down into the store-room at Launce.

"Halloo!" he called out roughly. "What are you doing in the steward's room?"

Launce took up a box of matches on the dresser. "I'm getting a light," he answered readily.

"I allow nobody below, forward of the main cabin, without my leave. The steward has per-

mitted a breach of discipline on board my vessel. The steward will leave my service.”

“The steward is not to blame.”

“I am the judge of that. Not you.”

Launce opened his lips to reply. An outbreak between the two men appeared to be inevitable, when the sailing-master of the yacht joined his employer on deck, and directed Turlington's attention to a question which is never to be trifled with at sea, the question of wind and tide.

The yacht was then in the Bristol Channel, at the entrance to Bideford Bay. The breeze, fast freshening, was also fast changing the direction from which it blew. The favorable tide had barely three hours more to run.

“The wind's shifting, sir,” said the sailing-master. “I'm afraid we shan't get round the point this tide, unless we lay her off on the other tack.”

Turlington shook his head.

“There are letters waiting for me at Bideford,” he said. “We have lost two days in the calm. I must send ashore to the post-office, whether we lose the tide or not.”

The vessel held on her course. Off the port of Bideford, the boat was sent ashore to the post-office, the yacht standing off and on, waiting the appearance of the letters. In the shortest time in which it was possible to bring them on board the letters were in Turlington's hands.

The men were hauling the boat up to the davits, the yacht was already heading off from the

land, when Turlington startled everybody by one peremptory word—"Stop!"

He had thrust all his letters but one into the pocket of his sailing jacket, without reading them. The one letter which he had opened he held in his closed hand. Rage was in his staring eyes, consternation was on his pale lips.

"Lower the boat!" he shouted; "I must get to London to-night." He stopped Sir Joseph, approaching him with opened mouth. "There's no time for questions and answers. I must get back." He swung himself over the side of the yacht, and addressed the sailing-master from the boat. "Save the tide if you can; if you can't, put them ashore to-morrow at Minehead or Watchet—wherever they like." He beckoned to Sir Joseph to lean over the bulwark, and hear something he had to say in private. "Remember what I told you about Launcelot Linzie!" he whispered fiercely. His parting look was for Natalie. He spoke to her with a strong constraint on himself, as gently as he could. "Don't be alarmed; I shall see you in London." He seated himself in the boat and took the tiller. The last words they heard him say were words urging the men at the oars to lose no time. He was invariably brutal with the men. "Pull, you lazy beggars!" he exclaimed, with an oath. "Pull for your lives!"

THIRD SCENE.

THE MONEY MARKET.

LET us be serious.—Business!

The new scene plunges us head foremost into the affairs of the Levant trading-house of Pizzituti, Turlington & Branca. What on earth do we know about the Levant Trade? Courage! If we have ever known what it is to want money we are perfectly familiar with the subject at starting. The Levant Trade does occasionally get into difficulties.—Turlington wanted money.

The letter which had been handed to him on board the yacht was from his third partner, Mr. Branca, and was thus expressed:

“A crisis in the trade. All right, so far—except our business with the small foreign firms. Bills to meet from those quarters, (say) forty thousand pounds—and, I fear, no remittances to cover them. Particulars stated in another letter addressed to you at Post-office, Ilfracombe. I am quite broken down with anxiety, and confined to my bed. Pizzituti is still detained at Smyrna. Come back at once.”

The same evening Turlington was at his office in Austin Friars, investigating the state of affairs, with his head clerk to help him.

Stated briefly, the business of the firm was of the widely miscellaneous sort. They plied a brisk trade in a vast variety of commodities. Nothing came amiss to them, from Manchester

cotton manufactures to Smyrna figs. They had branch houses at Alexandria and Odessa, and correspondents here, there, and everywhere, along the shores of the Mediterranean, and in the ports of the East. These correspondents were the persons alluded to in Mr. Branca's letter as "small foreign firms;" and they had produced the serious financial crisis in the affairs of the great house in Austin Friars, which had hurried Turlington up to London.

Every one of these minor firms claimed and received the privilege of drawing bills on Pizzituti, Turlington & Branca for amounts varying from four to six thousand pounds—on no better security than a verbal understanding that the money to pay the bills should be forwarded before they fell due. Competition, it is needless to say, was at the bottom of this insanely reckless system of trading. The native firms laid it down as a rule that they would decline to transact business with any house in the trade which refused to grant them their privilege. In the case of Turlington's house, the foreign merchants had drawn their bills on him for sums large in the aggregate, if not large in themselves; had long since turned those bills into cash in their own markets, for their own necessities; and had now left the money which their paper represented to be paid by their London correspondents as it fell due. In some instances, they had sent nothing but promises and excuses. In others, they had forwarded drafts on firms which had failed already, or which were about to fail, in the crisis.

After first exhausting his resources in ready money, Mr. Branca had provided for the more pressing necessities by pledging the credit of the house, so far as he *could* pledge it without exciting suspicion of the truth. This done, there were actually left, between that time and Christmas, liabilities to be met to the extent of forty thousand pounds, without a farthing in hand to pay that formidable debt.

After working through the night, this was the conclusion at which Richard Turlington arrived, when the rising sun looked in at him through the windows of his private room.

The whole force of the blow had fallen on *him*. The share of his partners in the business was of the most trifling nature. The capital was his, the risk was his. Personally and privately, *he* had to find the money, or to confront the one other alternative—ruin.

How was the money to be found?

With his position in the City, he had only to go to the famous money-lending and discounting house of Bulpit Brothers—reported to “turn over” millions in their business every year—and to supply himself at once with the necessary funds. Forty thousand pounds was a trifling transaction to Bulpit Brothers.

Having got the money, how, in the present state of his trade, was the loan to be paid back?

His thoughts reverted to his marriage with Natalie.

“Curious!” he said to himself, recalling his conversation with Sir Joseph on board the yacht.

“Graybrooke told me he would give his daughter half his fortune on her marriage. Half Graybrooke’s fortune happens to be just forty thousand pounds!” He took a turn in the room. No! It was impossible to apply to Sir Joseph. Once shake Sir Joseph’s conviction of his commercial solidity, and the marriage would be certainly deferred—if not absolutely broken off. Sir Joseph’s fortune could be made available, in the present emergency, in but one way—he might use it to repay his debt. He had only to make the date at which the loan expired coincide with the date of his marriage, and there was his father-in-law’s money at his disposal, or at his wife’s disposal—which meant the same thing. “It’s well I pressed Graybrooke about the marriage when I did!” he thought. “I can borrow the money at a short date. In three months from this Natalie will be my wife.”

He drove to his club to get breakfast, with his mind cleared, for the time being, of all its anxieties but one.

Knowing where he could procure the loan, he was by no means equally sure of being able to find the security on which he could borrow the money. Living up to his income; having no expectations from any living creature; possessing in landed property only some thirty or forty acres in Somersetshire, with a quaint little dwelling, half farm-house, half-cottage, attached—he was incapable of providing the needful security from his own personal resources. To appeal to wealthy friends in the City would be to let those

friends into the secret of his embarrassments, and to put his credit in peril. He finished his breakfast, and went back to Austin Friars—failing entirely, so far, to see how he was to remove the last obstacle now left in his way.

The doors were open to the public; business had begun. He had not been ten minutes in his room before the shipping-clerk knocked at the door and interrupted him, still absorbed in his own anxious thoughts.

“What is it?” he asked, irritably.

“Duplicate Bills of Lading, sir,” answered the clerk, placing the documents on his master’s table.

Found! There was the security on his writing-desk, staring him in the face! He dismissed the clerk and examined the papers.

They contained an account of goods shipped to the London house on board vessels sailing from Smyrna and Odessa, and they were signed by the masters of the ships, who thereby acknowledged the receipt of the goods, and undertook to deliver them safely to the persons owning them, as directed. First copies of these papers had already been placed in the possession of the London house. The duplicates had now followed, in case of accident. Richard Turlington instantly determined to make the duplicates serve as his security, keeping the first copies privately under lock and key, to be used in obtaining possession of the goods at the customary time. The fraud was a fraud in appearance only. The security was a pure formality. His mar-

riage would supply him with the funds needed for repaying the money, and the profits of his business would provide, in course of time, for restoring the dowry of his wife. It was simply a question of preserving his credit by means which were legitimately at his disposal. Within the lax limits of mercantile morality, Richard Turlington had a conscience. He put on his hat and took his false security to the money-lenders, without feeling at all lowered in his own estimation as an honest man.

Bulpit Brothers, long desirous of having such a name as his on their books, received him with open arms. The security (covering the amount borrowed) was accepted as a matter of course. The money was lent, for three months, with a stroke of the pen. Turlington stepped out again into the street, and confronted the City of London in the character of the noblest work of mercantile creation—a solvent man.*

The Fallen Angel, walking invisibly behind, in Richard's shadow, flapped his crippled wings in triumph. From that moment the Fallen Angel had got him.

* It may not be amiss to remind the incredulous reader that a famous firm in the City accepted precisely the same security as that here accepted by Bulpit Brothers, with the same sublime indifference to troubling themselves by making any inquiry about it.

FOURTH SCENE.

MUSWELL HILL.

THE next day Turlington drove to the suburbs, on the chance of finding the Graybrookes at home again. Sir Joseph disliked London, and could not prevail on himself to live any nearer to the metropolis than Muswell Hill. When Natalie wanted a change, and languished for balls, theaters, flower-shows, and the like, she had a room especially reserved for her in the house of Sir Joseph's married sister, Mrs. San-croft, living in that central deep of the fashionable whirlpool known among mortals as Berkeley Square.

On his way through the streets, Turlington encountered a plain proof that the Graybrookes must have returned. He was passed by Launce, driving, in company with a gentleman, in a cab. The gentleman was Launce's brother, and the two were on their way to the Commissioners of Police to make the necessary arrangements for instituting an inquiry into Turlington's early life.

Arrived at the gate of the villa, the information received only partially fulfilled the visitor's expectations. The family had returned on the previous evening. Sir Joseph and his sister were at home, but Natalie was away again already. She had driven into town to lunch with her aunt. Turlington went into the house.

“Have you lost any money?” Those were the first words uttered by Sir Joseph when he and Richard met again, after the parting on board the yacht.

“Not a farthing. I might have lost seriously, if I had not got back in time to set things straight. Stupidity on the part of my people left in charge—nothing more. It’s all right now.”

Sir Joseph lifted his eyes, with heartfelt devotion, to the ceiling. “Thank God, Richard!” he said, in tones of the deepest feeling. He rang the bell. “Tell Miss Graybrooke Mr. Turlington is here.” He turned again to Richard. “Lavinia is like me—Lavinia has been so anxious about you. We have both of us passed a sleepless night.” Miss Lavinia came in. Sir Joseph hurried to meet her, and took her affectionately by both hands. “My dear! the best of all good news, Richard has not lost a farthing.” Miss Lavinia lifted *her* eyes to the ceiling with heartfelt devotion, and said, “Thank God, Richard!”—like the echo of her brother’s voice; a little late, perhaps, for its reputation as an echo, but accurate to half a note in its perfect repetition of sound.

Turlington asked the question which it had been his one object to put in paying his visit to Muswell Hill.

“Have you spoken to Natalie?”

“This morning,” replied Sir Joseph. “An opportunity offered itself after breakfast. I took advantage of it, Richard—you shall hear how.”

He settled himself in his chair for one of his interminable stories; he began his opening sentence—and stopped, struck dumb at the first word. There was an unexpected obstacle in the way—his sister was not attending to him; his sister had silenced him at starting. The story touching, this time, on the question of marriage, Miss Lavinia had her woman's interest in seeing full justice done to the subject. She seized on her brother's narrative as on property in her own right.

"Joseph should have told you," she began, addressing herself to Turlington, "that our dear girl was unusually depressed in spirits this morning. Quite in the right frame of mind for a little serious talk about her future life. She ate nothing at breakfast, poor child, but a morsel of dry toast."

"And marmalade," said Sir Joseph, striking in at the first opportunity. The story, on this occasion, being Miss Lavinia's story, the polite contradictions necessary to its successful progress were naturally transferred from the sister to the brother, and became contradictions on Sir Joseph's side.

"No," said Miss Lavinia, gently, "if you *will* have it, Joseph—jam."

"I beg your pardon," persisted Sir Joseph; "marmalade."

"What *does* it matter, brother?"

"Sister! the late great and good Doctor Johnson said accuracy ought always to be studied even in the most trifling things."

"You *will* have your way, Joseph"—(this

was the formula—answering to Sir Joseph’s “Let us waive the point”—which Miss Lavinia used, as a means of conciliating her brother, and getting a fresh start for her story). “Well, we took dear Natalie out between us, after breakfast, for a little walk in the grounds. My brother opened the subject with infinite delicacy and tact. ‘Circumstances,’ he said, ‘into which it was not then necessary to enter, made it very desirable, young as she was, to begin to think of her establishment in life.’ And then he referred, Richard (so nicely), to your faithful and devoted attachment—”

“Excuse me, Lavinia. I began with Richard’s attachment, and then I got on to her establishment in life.”

“Excuse *me*, Joseph. You managed it much more delicately than you suppose. You didn’t drag Richard in by the head and shoulders in that way.”

“Lavinia! I began with Richard.”

“Joseph! your memory deceives you.”

Turlington’s impatience broke through all restraint.

“How did it end?” he asked. “Did you propose to her that we should be married in the first week of the New Year?”

“Yes!” said Miss Lavinia.

“No!” said Sir Joseph.

The sister looked at the brother with an expression of affectionate surprise. The brother looked at the sister with a fund of amiable contradiction, expressed in a low bow.

“Do you really mean to deny, Joseph, that you told Natalie we had decided on the first week in the New Year?”

“I deny the New Year, Lavinia. I said early in January.”

“You *will* have your way, Joseph! We were walking in the shrubbery at the time. I had our dear girl’s arm in mine, and I felt it tremble. She suddenly stopped. ‘Oh,’ she said, ‘not so soon!’ I said, ‘My dear, consider Richard!’ She turned to her father. She said, ‘Don’t, pray don’t press it so soon, papa! I respect Richard; I like Richard as your true and faithful friend; but I don’t love him as I ought to love him if I am to be his wife.’ Imagine her talking in that way! What could she possibly know about it? Of course we both laughed—”

“*You* laughed, Lavinia.”

“*You* laughed, Joseph.”

“Get on, for God’s sake!” cried Turlington, striking his hand passionately on the table by which he was sitting. “Don’t madden me by contradicting each other! Did she give way or not?”

Miss Lavinia turned to her brother. “Contradicting each other, Joseph!” she exclaimed, lifting her hands in blank amazement.

“Contradicting each other!” repeated Sir Joseph, equally astonished on his side. “My dear Richard, what can you be thinking of? I contradict my sister! We never disagreed in our lives.”

“I contradict my brother! We have never had a cross word between us from the time when we were children.”

Turlington internally cursed his own irritable temper.

“I beg your pardon—both of you,” he said. “I didn’t know what I was saying. Make some allowance for me. All my hopes in life are centered in Natalie; and you have just told me (in her own words, Miss Lavinia) that she doesn’t love. You don’t mean any harm, I dare say; but you cut me to the heart.”

This confession, and the look that accompanied it, touched the ready sympathies of the two old people in the right place. The remainder of the story dropped between them by common consent. They vied with each other in saying the comforting words which would allay their dear Richard’s anxiety. How little he knew of young girls. How could he be so foolish, poor fellow! as to attach any serious importance to what Natalie had said? As if a young creature in her teens knew the state of her own heart! Protestations and entreaties were matters of course, in such cases. Tears even might be confidently expected from a right-minded girl. It had all ended exactly as Richard would have wished it to end. Sir Joseph had said, “My child! this is a matter of experience; love will come when you are married.” And Miss Lavinia had added, “Dear Natalie, if you remembered your poor mother as I remember her, you would know that your father’s experience is to

be relied on." In that way they had put it to her; and she had hung her head and had given—all that maiden modesty could be expected to give—a silent consent. "The wedding-day was fixed for the first week in the New Year." ("No, Joseph; not January—the New Year.") "And God bless you, Richard! and may your married life be a long and happy one."

So the average ignorance of human nature, and the average belief in conventional sentiment, complacently contemplated the sacrifice of one more victim on the all-devouring altar of Marriage! So Sir Joseph and his sister provided Launcelot Linzie with the one argument which he wanted to convince Natalie: "Choose between making the misery of your life by marrying *him*, and making the happiness of your life by marrying *me*."

"When shall I see her?" asked Turlington, with Miss Lavinia (in tears which did *her* credit) in possession of one of his hands, and Sir Joseph (in tears which did *him* credit) in possession of the other.

"She will be back to dinner, dear Richard. Stay and dine."

"Thank you. I must go into the City first. I will come back and dine."

With that arrangement in prospect, he left them.

An hour later a telegram arrived from Natalie. She had consented to dine, as well as lunch, in Berkeley Square—sleeping there that night, and returning the next morning. Her father in-

stantly telegraphed back by the messenger, insisting on Natalie's return to Muswell Hill that evening, in time to meet Richard Turlington at dinner.

"Quite right, Joseph," said Miss Lavinia, looking over her brother's shoulder, while he wrote the telegram.

"She is showing a disposition to coquet with Richard," rejoined Sir Joseph, with the air of a man who knew female human nature in its remotest corners. "My telegram, Lavinia, will have its effect."

Sir Joseph was quite right. His telegram *had* its effect. It not only brought his daughter back to dinner—it produced another result which his prophetic faculty had altogether failed to foresee.

The message reached Berkeley Square at five o'clock in the afternoon. Let us follow the message.

FIFTH SCENE.

THE SQUARE.

BETWEEN four and five in the afternoon—when the women of the Western regions are in their carriages, and the men are at their clubs—London presents few places more conveniently adapted for purposes of private talk than the solitary garden inclosure of a square.

On the day when Richard Turlington paid his visit to Muswell Hill, two ladies (with a secret between them) unlocked the gate of the railed

garden in Berkeley Square. They shut the gate after entering the inclosure, but carefully forbore to lock it as well, and carefully restricted their walk to the westward side of the garden. One of them was Natalie Graybrooke. The other was Mrs. Sancroft's eldest daughter. A certain temporary interest attached, in the estimation of society, to this young lady. She had sold well in the marriage market. In other words, she had recently been raised to the position of Lord Winwood's second wife; his lordship conferring on the bride not only the honors of the peerage, but the additional distinction of being stepmother to his three single daughters, all older than herself. In person, Lady Winwood was little and fair. In character, she was dashing and resolute—a complete contrast to Natalie, and (on that very account) Natalie's bosom friend.

“My dear, one ambitious marriage in the family is quite enough! I have made up my mind that *you* shall marry the man you love. Don't tell me your courage is failing you—the excuse is contemptible; I decline to receive it. Natalie! the men have a phrase which exactly describes your character. You want back-bone!”

The bonnet of the lady who expressed herself in these peremptory terms barely reached the height of Natalie's shoulder. Natalie might have blown the little airy, light-haired, unsubstantial creature over the railings of the garden if she had taken a good long breath and stooped low enough. But who ever met with a tall

woman who had a will of her own? Natalie's languid brown eyes looked softly down in submissive attention from an elevation of five feet seven. Lady Winwood's brisk blue eyes looked brightly up in despotic command from an elevation of four feet eleven (in her shoes).

"You are trifling with Mr. Linzie, my dear. Mr. Linzie is a nice fellow. I like him. I won't have that."

"Louisa!"

"Mr. Turlington has nothing to recommend him. He is not a well-bred old gentleman of exalted rank. He is only an odious brute who happens to have made money. You shall *not* marry Mr. Turlington. And you *shall* marry Launcelot Linzie."

"Will you let me speak, Louisa?"

"I will let you answer—nothing more. Didn't you come crying to me this morning? Didn't you say, 'Louisa, they have pronounced sentence on me! I am to be married in the first week of the New Year. Help me out of it, for Heaven's sake!' You said all that, and more. And what did I do when I heard your story?"

"Oh, you were so kind—"

"Kind doesn't half express it. I have committed crimes on your account. I have deceived my husband and my mother. For your sake I got mamma to ask Mr. Linzie to lunch (as *my* friend!). For your sake I have banished my unoffending husband, not an hour since, to his club. You wretched girl, who arranged a private conference in the library? Who sent Mr.

Linzie off to consult his friend in the Temple on the law of clandestine marriage? Who suggested your telegraphing home, and stopping here for the night? Who made an appointment to meet your young man privately in this detestable place in ten minutes' time? I did! I did! I did! All in your interests. All to prevent you from doing what I have done—marrying to please your family instead of to please yourself. (I don't complain, mind, of Lord Winwood, or of his daughters. *He* is charming; his daughters I shall tame in course of time. You are different. And Mr. Turlington, as I observed before, is a brute.) Very well. Now what do you owe me on your side? You owe it to me at least to know your own mind. You don't know it. You coolly inform me that you daren't run the risk after all, and that you can't face the consequences on second thoughts. I'll tell you what! You don't deserve that nice fellow, who worships the very ground you tread on. You are a bread-and-butter miss. I don't believe you are fond of him!"

"Not fond of him!" Natalie stopped, and clasped her hands in despair of finding language strong enough for the occasion. At the same moment the sound of a closing gate caught her ear. She looked round. Launce had kept his appointment before his time. Launce was in the garden, rapidly approaching them.

"Now for the Law of Clandestine Marriage!" said Lady Winwood. "Mr. Linzie, we will take it sitting." She led the way to one of the

benches in the garden, and placed Launce between Natalie and herself. "Well, Chief Conspirator, have you got the License? No? Does it cost too much? Can I lend you the money?"

"It costs perjury, Lady Winwood, in my case," said Launce. "Natalie is not of age. I can only get a License by taking my oath that I marry her with her father's consent." He turned piteously to Natalie. "I couldn't very well do that," he said, in the tone of a man who feels bound to make an apology, "could I?" Natalie shuddered; Lady Winwood shrugged her shoulders.

"In your place a woman wouldn't have hesitated," her ladyship remarked. "But men are so selfish. Well! I suppose there is some other way?"

"Yes, there is another way," said Launce. "But there is a horrid condition attached to it—"

"Something worse than perjury, Mr. Linzie? Murder?"

"I'll tell you directly, Lady Winwood. The marriage comes first. The condition follows. There is only one chance for us. We must be married by banns."

"Banns!" cried Natalie. "Why, banns are publicly proclaimed in church!"

"They needn't be proclaimed in *your* church, you goose," said Lady Winwood. "And, even if they were, nobody would be the wiser. You may trust implicitly, my dear, in the elocution of an English clergyman!"

"That's just what my friend said," cried

Launce. “ ‘Take a lodging near a large parish church, in a remote part of London’—(this is my friend’s advice)—‘go to the clerk, tell him you want to be married by banns, and say you belong to that parish. As for the lady, in your place I should simplify it. I should say she belonged to the parish too. Give an address, and have some one there to answer questions. How is the clerk to know? He isn’t likely to be over-anxious about it—his fee is eighteen-pence. The clerk makes his profit out of you, after you are married. The same rule applies to the parson. He will have your names supplied to him on a strip of paper, with dozens of other names; and he will read them out all together in one inarticulate jumble in church. You will stand at the altar when your time comes, with Brown and Jones, Nokes and Styles, Jack and Gill. All that you will have to do is, to take care that your young lady doesn’t fall to Jack, and you to Gill, by mistake—and there you are, married by banns.’ My friend’s opinion, stated in his own words.”

Natalie sighed, and wrung her hands in her lap. “We shall never get through it,” she said, despondingly.

Lady Winwood took a more cheerful view.

“I see nothing very formidable as yet, my dear. But we have still to hear the end of it. You mentioned a condition just now, Mr. Linzie.”

“I am coming to the condition, Lady Winwood. You naturally suppose, as I did, that I

put Natalie into a cab, and run away with her from the church door?"

"Certainly. And I throw an old shoe after you for luck, and go home again."

Launce shook his head ominously.

"Natalie must go home again as well as you!"

Lady Winwood started. "Is that the condition you mentioned just now?" she asked.

"That is the condition. I may marry her without anything serious coming of it. But, if I run away with her afterward, and if you are there, aiding and abetting me, we are guilty of Abduction, and we may stand, side by side, at the bar of the Old Bailey to answer for it!"

Natalie sprang to her feet in horror. Lady Winwood held up one finger warningly, signing to her to let Launce go on.

"Natalie is not yet sixteen years old," Launce proceeded. "She must go straight back to her father's house from the church, and I must wait to run away with her till her next birthday. When she's turned sixteen, she's ripe for elopement—not an hour before. There is the law of Abduction! Despotism in a free country—that's what I call it!"

Natalie sat down again, with an air of relief.

"It's a very comforting law, *I* think," she said. "It doesn't force one to take the dreadful step of running away from home all at once. It gives one time to consider, and plan, and make up one's mind. I can tell you this, Launce, if I *am* to be persuaded into marrying you, the law of Abduction is the only thing that will induce

me to do it. You ought to thank the law, instead of abusing it."

Launce listened—without conviction.

"It's a pleasant prospect," he said, "to part at the church door, and to treat my own wife on the footing of a young lady who is engaged to marry another gentleman."

"Is it any pleasanter for *me*," retorted Natalie, "to have Richard Turlington courting me, when I am all the time your wife? I shall never be able to do it. I wish I was dead!"

"Come! come!" interposed Lady Winwood. "It's time to be serious. Natalie's birthday, Mr. Linzie, is next Christmas-day. She will be sixteen—"

"At seven in the morning," said Launce; "I got that out of Sir Joseph. At one minute past seven, Greenwich mean time, we may be off together. I got *that* out of the lawyer."

"And it isn't an eternity to wait from now till Christmas-day. You get that, by way of completing the list of your acquisitions, out of *me*. In the mean time, can you, or can you not, manage to meet the difficulties in the way of the marriage?"

"I have settled everything," Launce answered, confidently. "There is not a single difficulty left."

He turned to Natalie, listening to him in amazement, and explained himself. It had struck him that he might appeal—with his purse in his hand, of course—to the interest felt in his affairs by the late stewardess of the yacht. That

excellent woman had volunteered to do all that she could to help him. Her husband had obtained situations for his wife and himself on board another yacht—and they were both eager to assist in any conspiracy in which their late merciless master was destined to play the part of victim. When on shore, they lived in a populous London parish, far away from the fashionable district of Berkeley Square, and further yet from the respectable suburb of Muswell Hill. A room in the house could be nominally engaged for Natalie, in the assumed character of the stewardess's niece—the stewardess undertaking to answer any purely formal questions which might be put by the church authorities, and to be present at the marriage ceremony. As for Launce, he would actually, as well as nominally, live in the district close by; and the steward, if needful, would answer for *him*. Natalie might call at her parochial residence occasionally, under the wing of Lady Winwood; gaining leave of absence from Muswell Hill, on the plea of paying one of her customary visits at her aunt's house. The conspiracy, in brief, was arranged in all its details. Nothing was now wanting but the consent of the young lady; obtaining which, Launce would go to the parish church and give the necessary notice of a marriage by banns on the next day. There was the plot. What did the ladies think of it?

Lady Winwood thought it perfect.

Natalie was not so easily satisfied.

“My father has always been so kind to me!”

she said. "The one thing I can't get over, Launce, is distressing papa. If he had been hard on me—as some fathers are—I shouldn't mind." She suddenly brightened, as if she saw her position in a new light. "Why should you hurry me?" she asked. "I am going to dine at my aunt's to-day, and you are coming in the evening. Give me time! Wait till to-night."

Launce instantly entered his protest against wasting a moment longer. Lady Winwood opened her lips to support him. They were both silenced at the same moment by the appearance of one of Mrs. Sancroft's servants, opening the gate of the square.

Lady Winwood went forward to meet the man. A suspicion crossed her mind that he might be bringing bad news.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"I beg your pardon, my lady—the house-keeper said you were walking here with Miss Graybrooke. A telegram for Miss Graybrooke."

Lady Winwood took the telegram from the man's hand; dismissed him, and went back with it to Natalie. Natalie opened it nervously. She read the message—and instantly changed. Her cheeks flushed deep; her eyes flashed with indignation. "Even papa can be hard on me, it seems, when Richard asks him!" she exclaimed. She handed the telegram to Launce. Her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "You love me," she said, gently—and stopped. "Marry me!" she added, with a sudden burst of resolution. "I'll risk it!"

As she spoke those words, Lady Winwood read the telegram. It ran thus:

“Sir Joseph Graybrooke, Muswell Hill. To Miss Natalie Graybrooke, Berkeley Square. Come back immediately. You are engaged to dine here with Richard Turlington.”

Lady Winwood folded up the telegram with a malicious smile. “Well done, Sir Joseph!” thought her ladyship. “We might never have persuaded Natalie—but for You!”

SIXTH SCENE.

THE CHURCH.

THE time is morning; the date is early in the month of November. The place is a church, in a poor and populous parish in the undiscovered regions of London, eastward of the Tower, and hard by the river-side.

A marriage procession of five approaches the altar. The bridegroom is pale, and the bride is frightened. The bride’s friend (a resolute-looking little lady) encourages her in whispers. The two respectable persons, apparently man and wife, who complete the procession, seem to be not quite clear as to the position which they occupy at the ceremony. The beadle, as he marshals them before the altar, sees something under the surface in this wedding-party. Marriages in the lower ranks of life are the only marriages celebrated here. Is this a runaway match? The

beadle anticipates something out of the common in the shape of a fee.

The clergyman (the junior curate) appears from the vestry in his robes. The clerk takes his place. The clergyman's eye rests with a sudden interest and curiosity on the bride and bridegroom, and on the bride's friend; notices the absence of elderly relatives; remarks, in the two ladies especially, evidences of refinement and breeding entirely unparalleled in his professional experience of brides and brides' friends standing before the altar of that church; questions, silently and quickly, the eye of the clerk, occupied also in observing the strangers with interest. "Jenkinson" (the clergyman's look asks), "is this all right?" "Sir" (the clerk's look answers), "a marriage by banns; all the formalities have been observed." The clergyman opens his book. The formalities have been observed; his duty lies plainly before him. Attention, Launcelot! Courage, Natalie! The service begins.

Launce casts a last furtive look round the church. Will Sir Joseph Graybrooke start up and stop it from one of the empty pews? Is Richard Turlington lurking in the organ-loft, and only waiting till the words of the service appeal to him to prohibit the marriage, or "else hereafter forever to hold his peace?" No. The clergyman proceeds steadily, and nothing happens. Natalie's charming face grows paler and paler, Natalie's heart throbs faster and faster, as the time comes nearer for reading the words which unite them for life. Lady Winwood her-

self feels an unaccustomed fluttering in the region of the bosom. Her ladyship's thoughts revert, not altogether pleasantly, to her own marriage: "Ah me! what was *I* thinking of when I was in this position? Of the bride's beautiful dress, and of Lady Winwood's coming presentation at court!"

The service advances to the words in which they plight their troth. Launce has put the ring on her finger. Launce has repeated the words after the clergyman. Launce has married her! Done! Come what may of it, done!

The service ends. Bridegroom, bride, and witnesses go into the vestry to sign the book. The signing, like the service, is serious. No trifling with the truth is possible here. When it comes to Lady Winwood's turn, Lady Winwood must write her name. She does it, but without her usual grace and decision. She drops her handkerchief. The clerk picks it up for her, and notices that a coronet is embroidered in one corner.

The fees are paid. They leave the vestry. Other couples, when it is over, are talkative and happy. These two are more silent and more embarrassed than ever. Stranger still, while other couples go off with relatives and friends, all socially united in honor of the occasion, these two and their friends part at the church door. The respectable man and his wife go their way on foot. The little lady with the coronet on her handkerchief puts the bride into a cab, gets in herself, and directs the driver to

close the door, while the bridegroom is standing on the church steps! The bridegroom's face is clouded, as well it may be. He puts his head in at the window of the cab; he possesses himself of the bride's hand; he speaks in a whisper; he is apparently not to be shaken off. The little lady exerts her authority, separates the clasped hands, pushes the bridegroom away, and cries peremptorily to the driver to go on. The cab starts; the deserted husband drifts desolately anyhow down the street. The clerk, who has seen it all, goes back to the vestry and reports what has happened.

The rector (with his wife on his arm) has just dropped into the vestry on business in passing. He and the curate are talking about the strange marriage. The rector, gravely bent on ascertaining that no blame rests with the church, interrogates, and is satisfied. The rector's wife is not so easy to deal with. She has looked at the signatures in the book. One of the names is familiar to her. She cross-examines the clerk as soon as her husband is done with him. When she hears of the coronet on the handkerchief she points to the signature of "Louisa Winwood," and says to the rector, "I know who it is! Lord Winwood's second wife. I went to school with his lordship's daughters by his first marriage. We occasionally meet at the Sacred Concerts (on the 'Ladies' Committee'); I shall find an opportunity of speaking to them. One moment, Mr. Jenkinson, I will write down the names before you put away the book. 'Launcelot Linzie,'

‘Natalie Graybrooke.’ Very pretty names; quite romantic. I do delight in a romance. Good-morning.”

She gives the curate a parting smile, and the clerk a parting nod, and sails out of the vestry. Natalie, silently returning in Lady Winwood’s company to Muswell Hill; and Launce, cursing the law of Abduction as he roams the streets—little think that the ground is already mined under their feet. Richard Turlington may hear of it now, or may hear of it later. The discovery of the marriage depends entirely on a chance meeting between the lord’s daughters and the rector’s wife.

SEVENTH SCENE.

THE EVENING PARTY.

MR. TURLINGTON,

LADY WINWOOD *At Home.*

Wednesday, December 15th.—Ten o’clock.

“DEAREST NATALIE—As the brute insists, the brute must have the invitation which I inclose. Never mind, my child. You and Launce are coming to dinner, and I will see that you have your little private opportunities of retirement afterward. All I expect of you in return is, *not* to look (when you come back) as if your hus-

Wait till you are sixteen. I delight in novelty, but the novelty of appearing at the Old Bailey is beyond my ambition. Is the brute coming to-night?"

"Of course. He insists on following me wherever I go. He lunched at Muswell Hill to-day. More complaints of my incomprehensible coldness to him. Another scolding from papa. A furious letter from Launce. If I let Richard kiss my hand again in his presence, Launce warns me he will knock him down. Oh, the meanness and the guiltiness of the life I am leading now! I am in the falsest of all false positions, Louisa, and you encouraged me to do it. I believe Richard Turlington suspects us. The last two times Launce and I tried to get a minute together at my aunt's, he contrived to put himself in our way. There he was, my dear, with his scowling face, looking as if he longed to kill Launce. Can you do anything for us to-night? Not on my account. But Launce is so impatient. If he can't say two words to me alone this evening, he declares he will come to Muswell Hill, and catch me in the garden to-morrow."

"Compose yourself, my dear; he shall say his two words to-night."

"How?"

Lady Winwood pointed through the curtained entrance of the boudoir to the door of the drawing-room. Beyond the door was the staircase landing. And beyond the landing was a second drawing-room, the smaller of the two.

“There are only three or four people coming to dinner,” her ladyship proceeded; “and a few more in the evening. Being a small party, the small drawing-room will do for us. This drawing-room will not be lighted, and there will be only my reading-lamp here in the boudoir. I shall give the signal for leaving the dining-room earlier than usual. Launce will join us before the evening party begins. The moment he appears, send him in here—boldly before your aunt and all of us.”

“For what?”

“For your fan. Leave it there under the sofa-cushion before we go down to dinner. You will sit next to Launce, and you will give him private instructions not to find the fan. You will get impatient—you will go to find it yourself—and there you are. Take care of your shoulders, Mrs. Linzie! I have nothing more to say.”

The guests asked to dinner began to arrive. Lady Winwood was recalled to her duties as mistress of the house.

It was a pleasant little dinner—with one drawback. It began too late. The ladies only reached the small drawing-room at ten minutes to ten. Launce was only able to join them as the clock struck.

“Too late!” whispered Natalie. “He will be here directly.”

“Nobody comes punctually to an evening party,” said Launce. “Don’t let us lose a moment. Send me for your fan.”

Natalie opened her lips to say the necessary words. Before she could speak, the servant announced—"Mr. Turlington."

He came in, with his stiffly-upright shirt collar and his loosely-fitting glossy black clothes. He made his sullen and clumsy bow to Lady Winwood. And then he did, what he had done dozens of times already—he caught Natalie, with her eyes still bright and her face still animated (after talking to Launce)—a striking contrast to the cold and unimpulsive young lady whom he was accustomed to see while Natalie was talking to *him*.

Lord Winwood's daughters were persons of some celebrity in the world of amateur music. Noticing the look that Turlington cast at Launce, Lady Winwood whispered to Miss Lavinia—who instantly asked the young ladies to sing. Launce, in obedience to a sign from Natalie, volunteered to find the music-books. It is needless to add that he pitched on the wrong volume at starting. As he lifted it from the piano to take it back to the stand, there dropped out from between the leaves a printed letter, looking like a circular. One of the young ladies took it up, and ran her eye over it, with a start.

"The Sacred Concerts!" she exclaimed.

Her two sisters, standing by, looked at each other guiltily: "What will the Committee say to us? We entirely forgot the meeting last month."

"Is there a meeting this month?"

They all looked anxiously at the printed letter.

“Yes! The twenty-third of December. Put it down in your book, Amelia.” Amelia, then and there, put it down among the engagements for the latter end of the month. And Natalie’s unacknowledged husband placidly looked on.

So did the merciless irony of circumstances make Launce the innocent means of exposing his own secret to discovery. Thanks to his success in laying his hand on the wrong music-book, there would now be a meeting—two good days before the elopement could take place—between the lord’s daughters and the rector’s wife!

The guests of the evening began to appear by twos and threes. The gentlemen below stairs left the dinner-table, and joined them.

The small drawing-room was pleasantly filled, and no more. Sir Joseph Graybrooke, taking Turlington’s hand, led him eagerly to their host. The talk in the dining-room had turned on finance. Lord Winwood was not quite satisfied with some of his foreign investments; and Sir Joseph’s “dear Richard” was the very man to give him a little sound advice. The three laid their heads together in a corner. Launce (watching them) slyly pressed Natalie’s hand. A renowned “virtuoso” had arrived, and was thundering on the piano. The attention of the guests generally was absorbed in the performance. A fairer chance of sending Launce for the fan could not possibly have offered itself. While the financial discussion was still proceeding, the married lovers were ensconced together alone in the boudoir.

Lady Winwood (privately observant of their absence) kept her eye on the corner, watching Richard Turlington.

He was talking earnestly—with his back toward the company. He neither moved nor looked round. It came to Lord Winwood's turn to speak. He preserved the same position, listening. Sir Joseph took up the conversation next. Then his attention wandered—he knew beforehand what Sir Joseph would say. His eyes turned anxiously toward the place in which he had left Natalie. Lord Winwood said a word. His head turned back again toward the corner. Sir Joseph put an objection. He glanced once more over his shoulder—this time at the place in which Launce had been standing. The next moment his host recalled his attention, and made it impossible for him to continue his scrutiny of the room. At the same time, two among the evening guests, bound for another party, approached to take leave of the lady of the house. Lady Winwood was obliged to rise, and attend to them. They had something to say to her before they left, and they said it at terrible length, standing so as to intercept her view of the proceedings of the enemy. When she had got rid of them at last, she looked—and behold Lord Winwood and Sir Joseph were the only occupants of the corner!

Delaying one moment, to set the "virtuoso" thundering once more, Lady Winwood slipped out of the room and crossed the landing. At the entrance to the empty drawing-room she heard

Turlington's voice, low and threatening, in the boudoir. Jealousy has a Second Sight of its own. He had looked in the right place at starting—and, oh heavens! he had caught them.

Her ladyship's courage was beyond dispute; but she turned pale as she approached the entrance to the boudoir.

There stood Natalie—at once angry and afraid—between the man to whom she was ostensibly engaged, and the man to whom she was actually married. Turlington's rugged face expressed a martyrdom of suppressed fury. Launce—in the act of offering Natalie her fan—smiled, with the cool superiority of a man who knew that he had won his advantage, and who triumphed in knowing it.

“I forbid you to take your fan from that man's hands,” said Turlington, speaking to Natalie, and pointing to Launce.

“Isn't it rather too soon to begin ‘forbidding’?” asked Lady Winwood, good-humoredly.

“Exactly what I say!” exclaimed Launce. “It seems necessary to remind Mr. Turlington that he is not married to Natalie yet!”

Those last words were spoken in a tone which made both the women tremble inwardly for results. Lady Winwood took the fan from Launce with one hand, and took Natalie's arm with the other.

“There is your fan, my dear,” she said, in her easy off-hand manner. “Why do you allow these two barbarous men to keep you here while the great Bootmann is playing the Nightmare

Sonata in the next room? Launce! Mr. Turlington! follow me, and learn to be musical directly! You have only to shut your eyes, and you will fancy you hear four modern German composers playing, instead of one, and not the ghost of a melody among all the four." She led the way out with Natalie, and whispered, "Did he catch you?" Natalie whispered back, "I heard him in time. He only caught us looking for the fan." The two men waited behind to have two words together alone in the boudoir.

"This doesn't end here, Mr. Linzie!"

Launce smiled satirically. "For once I agree with you," he answered. "It doesn't end here, as you say."

Lady Winwood stopped, and looked back at them from the drawing-room door. They were keeping her waiting—they had no choice but to follow the mistress of the house.

Arrived in the next room, both Turlington and Launce resumed their places among the guests with the same object in view. As a necessary result of the scene in the boudoir, each had his own special remonstrance to address to Sir Joseph. Even here, Launce was beforehand with Turlington. He was the first to get possession of Sir Joseph's private ear. His complaint took the form of a protest against Turlington's jealousy, and an appeal for a reconsideration of the sentence which excluded him from Muswell Hill. Watching them from a distance, Turlington's suspicious eye detected the appearance of something unduly confidential in the colloquy be-

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tween the two. Under cover of the company, he stole behind them and listened.

The great Bootmann had arrived at that part of the Nightmare Sonata in which musical sound, produced principally with the left hand, is made to describe, beyond all possibility of mistake, the rising of the moon in a country church-yard and a dance of Vampires round a maiden's grave. Sir Joseph, having no chance against the Vampires in a whisper, was obliged to raise his voice to make himself audible in answering and comforting Launce. "I sincerely sympathize with you," Turlington heard him say; "and Natalie feels about it as I do. But Richard is an obstacle in our way. We must look to the consequences, my dear boy, supposing Richard found us out." He nodded kindly to his nephew; and, declining to pursue the subject, moved away to another part of the room.

Turlington's jealous distrust, wrought to the highest pitch of irritability for weeks past, instantly associated the words he had just heard with the words spoken by Launce in the boudoir, which had reminded him that he was not married to Natalie yet. Was there treachery at work under the surface? and was the object to persuade weak Sir Joseph to reconsider his daughter's contemplated marriage in a sense favorable to Launce? Turlington's blind suspicion overleaped at a bound all the manifest improbabilities which forbade such a conclusion as this. After an instant's consideration with himself, he decided on keeping his own counsel,

and on putting Sir Joseph's good faith then and there to a test which he could rely on as certain to take Natalie's father by surprise.

"Graybrooke!"

Sir Joseph started at the sight of his future son-in-law's face.

"My dear Richard, you are looking very strangely! Is the heat of the room too much for you?"

"Never mind the heat! I have seen enough to-night to justify me in insisting that your daughter and Launcelot Linzie shall meet no more between this and the day of my marriage." Sir Joseph attempted to speak. Turlington declined to give him the opportunity. "Yes! yes! your opinion of Linzie isn't mine, I know. I saw you as thick as thieves together just now." Sir Joseph once more attempted to make himself heard. Wearied by Turlington's perpetual complaints of his daughter and his nephew, he was sufficiently irritated by this time to have reported what Launce had actually said to him if he had been allowed the chance. But Turlington persisted in going on. "I cannot prevent Linzie from being received in this house, and at your sister's," he said; "but I can keep him out of *my* house in the country, and to the country let us go. I propose a change in the arrangements. Have you any engagement for the Christmas holidays?"

He paused, and fixed his eyes attentively on Sir Joseph. Sir Joseph, looking a little surprised, replied briefly that he had no engagement.

“In that case,” resumed Turlington, “I invite you all to Somersetshire, and I propose that the marriage shall take place from my house, and not from yours. Do you refuse?”

“It is contrary to the usual course of proceeding in such cases, Richard,” Sir Joseph began.

“Do you refuse?” reiterated Turlington. “I tell you plainly, I shall place a construction of my own upon your motive if you do.”

“No, Richard,” said Sir Joseph, quietly, “I accept.”

Turlington drew back a step in silence. Sir Joseph had turned the tables on him, and had taken *him* by surprise.

“It will upset several plans, and be strongly objected to by the ladies,” proceeded the old gentleman. “But if nothing less will satisfy you, I say, Yes! I shall have occasion, when we meet to-morrow at Muswell Hill, to appeal to your indulgence under circumstances which may greatly astonish you. The least I can do, in the meantime, is to set an example of friendly sympathy and forbearance on my side. No more now, Richard. Hush! the music!”

It was impossible to make him explain himself further that night. Turlington was left to interpret Sir Joseph’s mysterious communication with such doubtful aid to success as his own unassisted ingenuity might afford.

The meeting of the next day at Muswell Hill had for its object—as Turlington had already been informed—the drawing of Natalie’s marriage-settlement. Was the question of money at

the bottom of Sir Joseph's contemplated appeal to his indulgence? He thought of his commercial position. The depression in the Levant trade still continued. Never had his business at any previous time required such constant attention, and repaid that attention with so little profit. The Bills of Lading had been already used by the firm, in the ordinary course of trade, to obtain possession of the goods. The duplicates in the hands of Bulpit Brothers were literally waste paper. Repayment of the loan of forty thousand pounds (with interest) was due in less than a month's time. There was his commercial position! Was it possible that money-loving Sir Joseph had any modification to propose in the matter of his daughter's dowry? The bare dread that it might be so struck him cold. He quitted the house—and forgot to wish Natalie good-night.

Meanwhile, Launce had left the evening party before him—and Launce also found matter for serious reflection presented to his mind before he slept that night. In other words, he found, on reaching his lodgings, a letter from his brother, marked "private." Had the inquiry into the secrets of Turlington's early life—now prolonged over some weeks—led to positive results at last? Launce eagerly opened the letter. It contained a Report and a Summary. He passed at once to the Summary, and read these words:

"If you only want moral evidence to satisfy your own mind, your end is gained. There is, morally, no doubt that Turlington and the sea-

captain who cast the foreign sailor overboard to drown are one and the same man. Legally, the matter is beset by difficulties, Turlington having destroyed all provable connection between his present self and his past life. There is only one chance for us. A sailor on board the ship (who was in his master's secrets) is supposed to be still living (under his master's protection). All the black deeds of Turlington's early life are known to this man. He can prove the facts, if we can find him, and make it worth his while to speak. Under what *alias* he is hidden we do not know. His own name is Thomas Wildfang. If we are to make the attempt to find him, not a moment is to be lost. The expenses may be serious. Let me know whether we are to go on, or whether enough has been done to attain the end you have in view."

Enough had been done—not only to satisfy Launce, but to produce the right effect on Sir Joseph's mind if Sir Joseph proved obdurate when the secret of the marriage was revealed. Launce wrote a line directing the stoppage of the proceedings at the point which they had now reached. "Here is a reason for her not marrying Turlington," he said to himself, as he placed the papers under lock and key. "And if she doesn't marry Turlington," he added, with a lover's logic, "why shouldn't she marry Me?"

EIGHTH SCENE.

THE LIBRARY.

THE next day Sir Joseph Graybrooke, Sir Joseph's lawyer, Mr. Dicas (highly respectable and immensely rich), and Richard Turlington were assembled in the library at Muswell Hill, to discuss the question of Natalie's marriage-settlement.

After the usual preliminary phrases had been exchanged, Sir Joseph showed some hesitation in openly approaching the question which the little party of three had met to debate. He avoided his lawyer's eye; and he looked at Turlington rather uneasily.

"Richard," he began at last, "when I spoke to you about your marriage, on board the yacht, I said I would give my daughter—" Either his courage or his breath failed him at that point. He was obliged to wait a moment before he could go on.

"I said I would give my daughter half my fortune on her marriage," he resumed. "Forgive me, Richard. I can't do it!"

Mr. Dicas, waiting for his instructions, laid down his pen and looked at Sir Joseph's son-in-law elect. What would Mr. Turlington say?

He said nothing. Sitting opposite the window, he rose when Sir Joseph spoke, and placed himself at the other side of the table, with his back to the light.

“My eyes are weak this morning,” he said, in an unnaturally low tone of voice. “The light hurts them.”

He could find no more plausible excuse than that for concealing his face in shadow from the scrutiny of the two men on either side of him. The continuous moral irritation of his unhappy courtship—a courtship which had never advanced beyond the frigid familiarity of kissing Natalie’s hand in the presence of others—had physically deteriorated him. Even *his* hardy nerves began to feel the long strain of suspicion that had been laid unremittingly on them for weeks past. His power of self-control—he knew it himself—was not to be relied on. He could hide his face: he could no longer command it.

“Did you hear what I said, Richard?”

“I heard. Go on.”

Sir Joseph proceeded, gathering confidence as he advanced.

“Half my fortune!” he repeated. “It’s parting with half my life; it’s saying good-by forever to my dearest friend! My money has been such a comfort to me, Richard; such a pleasant occupation for my mind. I know no reading so interesting and so instructive as the reading of one’s Banker’s Book. To watch the outgoings on one side,” said Sir Joseph, with a gentle and pathetic solemnity, “and the incomings on the other—the sad lessening of the balance at one time, and the cheering and delightful growth of it at another—what absorbing reading! The best novel that ever was written isn’t to be men-

tioned in a breath with it. I can not, Richard, I really can *not*, see my nice round balance shrink up to half the figure that I have been used to for a lifetime. It may be weak of me," proceeded Sir Joseph, evidently feeling that it was not weak of him at all, "but we all have our tender place, and my Banker's Book is mine. Besides, it isn't as if you wanted it. If you wanted it, of course—but you don't want it. You are a rich man; you are marrying my dear Natalie for love, not for money. You and she and my grandchildren will have it all at my death. It *can* make no difference to you to wait a few years till the old man's chair at the fireside is empty. Will you say the fourth part, Richard, instead of the half? Twenty thousand," pleaded Sir Joseph, piteously. "I can bear twenty thousand off. For God's sake don't ask me for more!"

The lips of the lawyer twisted themselves sourly into an ironical smile. He was quite as fond of his money as Sir Joseph. He ought to have felt for his client; but rich men have no sympathy with one another. Mr. Dicas openly despised Sir Joseph.

There was a pause. The robin-redbreasts in the shrubbery outside must have had prodigious balances at their bankers; they hopped up on the window-sill so fearlessly; they looked in with so little respect at the two rich men.

"Don't keep me in suspense, Richard," proceeded Sir Joseph. "Speak out. Is it yes or no?"

Turlington struck his hand excitedly on the

table, and burst out on a sudden with the answer which had been so strangely delayed.

“Twenty thousand with all my heart!” he said. “On this condition, Graybrooke, that every farthing of it is settled on Natalie, and on her children after her. Not a half-penny to me!” he cried magnanimously, in his brassiest tones. “Not a half-penny to me!”

Let no man say the rich are heartless. Sir Joseph seized his son-in-law’s hand in silence, and burst into tears.

Mr. Dicas, habitually a silent man, uttered the first two words that had escaped him since the business began. “Highly creditable,” he said, and took a note of his instructions on the spot.

From that point the business of the settlement flowed smoothly on to its destined end. Sir Joseph explained his views at the fullest length, and the lawyer’s pen kept pace with him. Turlington, remaining in his place at the table, restricted himself to a purely passive part in the proceedings. He answered briefly when it was absolutely necessary to speak, and he agreed with the two elders in everything. A man has no attention to place at the disposal of other people when he stands at a crisis in his life. Turlington stood at that crisis, at the trying moment when Sir Joseph’s unexpected proposal pressed instantly for a reply. Two merciless alternatives confronted him. Either he must repay the borrowed forty thousand pounds on the day when repayment was due, or he must ask Bulpit Brothers to grant him an extension of time, and

so inevitably provoke an examination into the fraudulent security deposited with the firm, which could end in but one way. His last, literally his last chance, after Sir Joseph had diminished the promised dowry by one half, was to adopt the high-minded tone which became his position, and to conceal the truth until he could reveal it to his father-in-law in the privileged character of Natalie's husband. "I owe forty thousand pounds, sir, in a fortnight's time, and I have not got a farthing of my own. Pay for me, or you will see your son-in-law's name in the Bankrupt's List." For his daughter's sake—who could doubt it?—Sir Joseph would produce the money. The one thing needful was to be married in time. If either by accident or treachery Sir Joseph was led into deferring the appointed day, by so much as a fortnight only, the fatal "call" would come, and the firm of Pizzituti, Turlington & Branca would appear in the *Gazette*.

So he reasoned, standing on the brink of the terrible discovery which was soon to reveal to him that Natalie was the wife of another man.

"Richard!"

"Mr. Turlington!"

He started, and roused his attention to present things. Sir Joseph on one side, and the lawyer on the other, were both appealing to him, and both regarding him with looks of amazement.

"Have you done with the settlement?" he asked.

"My dear Richard, we have done with it long

since," replied Sir Joseph. "Have you really not heard what I have been saying for the last quarter of an hour to good Mr. Dicas here? What *can* you have been thinking of?"

Turlington did not attempt to answer the question. "Am I interested," he asked, "in what you have been saying to Mr. Dicas?"

"You shall judge for yourself," answered Sir Joseph, mysteriously; "I have been giving Mr. Dicas his instructions for making my Will. I wish the Will and the Marriage-Settlement to be executed at the same time. Read the instructions, Mr. Dicas."

Sir Joseph's contemplated Will proved to have two merits—it was simple and it was short. Excepting one or two trifling legacies to distant relatives, he had no one to think of (Miss Lavinia being already provided for) but his daughter and the children who might be born of her marriage. In its various provisions, made with these two main objects in view, the Will followed the precedents established in such cases. It differed in no important respect from the tens of thousands of other wills made under similar circumstances. Sir Joseph's motive in claiming special attention for it still remained unexplained, when Mr. Dicas reached the clause devoted to the appointment of executors and trustees; and announced that this portion of the document was left in blank.

"Sir Joseph Graybrooke, are you prepared to name the persons whom you appoint?" asked the lawyer.

Sir Joseph rose, apparently for the purpose of giving special importance to the terms in which he answered his lawyer's question.

"I appoint," he said, "as sole executor and trustee—Richard Turlington."

It was no easy matter to astonish Mr. Dicas. Sir Joseph's reply absolutely confounded him. He looked across the table at his client and delivered himself on this special occasion of as many as three words.

"Are you mad?" he asked.

Sir Joseph's healthy complexion slightly reddened. "I never was in more complete possession of myself, Mr. Dicas, than at this moment."

Mr. Dicas was not to be silenced in that way.

"Are you aware of what you do," persisted the lawyer, "if you appoint Mr. Turlington as sole executor and trustee? You put it in the power of your daughter's husband, sir, to make away with every farthing of your money after your death."

Turlington had hitherto listened with an appearance of interest in the proceedings, which he assumed as an act of politeness. To his view, the future was limited to the date at which Bulpit Brothers had a right to claim the repayment of their loan. The Will was a matter of no earthly importance to him, by comparison with the infinitely superior interest of the Marriage. It was only when the lawyer's brutally plain language forced his attention to it that the question of his pecuniary interest in his father-

in-law's death assumed its fit position in his mind.

His color rose; and *he* too showed that he was offended by what Mr. Dicas had just said.

“Not a word, Richard! Let me speak for you as well as for myself,” said Sir Joseph. “For seven years past,” he continued, turning to the lawyer, “I have been accustomed to place the most unlimited trust in Richard Turlington. His disinterested advice has enabled me largely to increase my income, without placing a farthing of the principal in jeopardy. On more than one occasion, I have entreated him to make use of my money in his business. He has invariably refused to do so. Even his bitterest enemies, sir, have been obliged to acknowledge that my interests were safe when committed to his care. Am I to begin distrusting him, now that I am about to give him my daughter in marriage? Am I to leave it on record that I doubt him for the first time—when my Will is opened after my death? No! I can confide the management of the fortune which my child will inherit after me to no more competent or more honorable hands than the hands of the man who is to marry her. I maintain my appointment, Mr. Dicas! I persist in placing the whole responsibility under my Will in my son-in-law's care.”

Turlington attempted to speak. The lawyer attempted to speak. Sir Joseph—with a certain simple dignity which had its effect on both of them—declined to hear a word on either side. “No, Richard! as long as I am alive this is my

business, not yours. No, Mr. Dicus! I understand that it is your business to protest professionally. You have protested. Fill in the blank space as I have told you. Or leave the instructions on the table, and I will send for the nearest solicitor to complete them in your place."

Those words placed the lawyer's position plainly before him. He had no choice but to do as he was bid, or to lose a good client. He did as he was bid, and grimly left the room.

Sir Joseph, with old-fashioned politeness, followed him as far as the hall. Returning to the library to say a few friendly words before finally dismissing the subject of the Will, he found himself seized by the arm, and dragged without ceremony, in Turlington's powerful grasp, to the window.

"Richard!" he exclaimed, "what does this mean?"

"Look!" cried the other, pointing through the window to a grassy walk in the grounds, bounded on either side by shrubberies, and situated at a little distance from the house. "Who is that man?—quick! before we lose sight of him—the man crossing there from one shrubbery to the other?" Sir Joseph failed to recognize the figure before it disappeared. Turlington whispered fiercely, close to his ear—"Launcelot Linzie!"

In perfect good faith Sir Joseph declared that the man could not possibly have been Launce. Turlington's frenzy of jealous suspicion was not to be so easily calmed. He asked significantly

for Natalie. She was reported to be walking in the grounds. "I knew it!" he said, with an oath—and hurried out into the grounds to discover the truth for himself.

Some little time elapsed before he came back to the house. He had discovered Natalie—alone. Not a sign of Launce had rewarded his search. For the hundredth time he had offended Natalie. For the hundredth time he was compelled to appeal to the indulgence of her father and her aunt. "It won't happen again," he said, sullenly penitent. "You will find me quite another man when I have got you all at my house in the country. Mind!" he burst out, with a furtive look, which expressed his inveterate distrust of Natalie and of every one about her. "Mind! it's settled that you all come to me in Somersetshire, on Monday next." Sir Joseph answered rather dryly that it *was* settled. Turlington turned to leave the room—and suddenly came back. "It's understood," he went on, addressing Miss Lavinia, "that the seventh of next month is the date fixed for the marriage. Not a day later!" Miss Lavinia replied, rather dryly on her side, "Of course, Richard; not a day later." He muttered, "All right"—and hurriedly left them.

Half an hour afterward Natalie came in, looking a little confused.

"Has he gone?" she asked, whispering to her aunt.

Relieved on this point, she made straight for the library—a room which she rarely entered at

that or any other period of the day. Miss Lavinia followed her, curious to know what it meant. Natalie hurried to the window, and waved her handkerchief—evidently making a signal to some one outside. Miss Lavinia instantly joined her, and took her sharply by the hand.

“Is it possible, Natalie?” she asked. “Has Launcelot Linzie really been here, unknown to your father or to me?”

“Where is the harm if he has?” answered Natalie, with a sudden outbreak of temper. “Am I never to see my cousin again, because Mr. Turlington happens to be jealous of him?”

She suddenly turned away her head. The rich color flowed over her face and neck. Miss Lavinia, proceeding sternly with the administration of the necessary reproof, was silenced midway by a new change in her niece’s variable temper. Natalie burst into tears. Satisfied with this appearance of sincere contrition, the old lady consented to overlook what had happened; and, for this occasion only, to keep her niece’s secret. They would all be in Somersetshire, she remarked, before any more breaches of discipline could be committed. Richard had fortunately made no discoveries; and the matter might safely be trusted, all things considered, to rest where it was.

Miss Lavinia might possibly have taken a less hopeful view of the circumstances, if she had known that one of the men-servants at Muswell Hill was in Richard Turlington’s pay, and that

this servant had seen Launce leave the grounds by the back-garden gate.

NINTH SCENE.

THE DRAWING-ROOM.

“AMELIA!”

“Say something.”

“Ask him to sit down.”

Thus addressing one another in whispers, the three stepdaughters of Lady Winwood stood bewildered in their own drawing-room, helplessly confronting an object which appeared before them on the threshold of the door.

The date was the 23d of December. The time was between two and three in the afternoon. The occasion was the return of the three sisters from the Committee meeting of the Sacred Concerts' Society. And the object was Richard Turlington.

He stood hat in hand at the door, amazed by his reception. “I have come up this morning from Somersetshire,” he said. “Haven't you heard? A matter of business at the office has forced me to leave my guests at my house in the country. I return to them to-morrow. When I say my guests, I mean the Graybrookes. Don't you know they are staying with me? Sir Joseph and Miss Lavinia and Natalie?” On the utterance of Natalie's name, the sisters roused themselves. They turned about and regarded

each other with looks of dismay. Turlington's patience began to fail him. "Will you be so good as to tell me what all this means?" he said, a little sharply. "Miss Lavinia asked me to call here when she heard I was coming to town. I was to take charge of a pattern for a dress, which she said you would give me. You ought to have received a telegram explaining it all, hours since. Has the message not reached you?"

The leading spirit of the three sisters was Miss Amelia. She was the first who summoned presence of mind enough to give a plain answer to Turlington's plain question.

"We received the telegram this morning," she said. "Something has happened since which has shocked and surprised us. We beg your pardon." She turned to one of her sisters. "Sophia, the pattern is ready in the drawer of that table behind you. Give it to Mr. Turlington."

Sophia produced the packet. Before she handed it to the visitor, she looked at her sister. "Ought we to let Mr. Turlington go," she asked, "as if nothing had happened?"

Amelia considered silently with herself. Dorothea, the third sister (who had not spoken yet), came forward with a suggestion. She proposed, before proceeding further, to inquire whether Lady Winwood was in the house. The idea was instantly adopted. Sophia rang the bell. Amelia put the questions when the servant appeared.

Lady Winwood had left the house for a drive immediately after luncheon. Lord Winwood—

inquired for next—had accompanied her ladyship. No message had been left indicating the hour of their return.

The sisters looked at Turlington, uncertain what to say or do next. Miss Amelia addressed him as soon as the servant had left the room.

“Is it possible for you to remain here until either my father or Lady Winwood return?” she asked.

“It is quite impossible. Minutes are of importance to me to-day.”

“Will you give us one of your minutes? We want to consider something which we may have to say to you before you go.”

Turlington, wondering, took a chair. Miss Amelia put the case before her sisters from the sternly conscientious point of view, at the opposite end of the room.

“We have not found out this abominable deception by any underhand means,” she said. “The discovery has been forced upon us, and we stand pledged to nobody to keep the secret. Knowing as we do how cruelly this gentleman has been used, it seems to me that we are bound in honor to open his eyes to the truth. If we remain silent we make ourselves Lady Winwood’s accomplices. I, for one—I don’t care what may come of it—refuse to do that.”

Her sisters agreed with her. The first chance their clever stepmother had given them of asserting their importance against hers was now in their hands. Their jealous hatred of Lady Winwood assumed the mask of Duty—duty toward

an outraged and deceived fellow-creature. Could any earthly motive be purer than that? "Tell him, Amelia!" cried the two young ladies, with the headlong recklessness of the sex which only stops to think when the time for reflection has gone by.

A vague sense of something wrong began to stir uneasily in Turlington's mind.

"Don't let me hurry you," he said, "but if you really have anything to tell me—"

Miss Amelia summoned her courage, and began.

"We have something very dreadful to tell you," she said, interrupting him. "You have been presented in this house, Mr. Turlington, as a gentleman engaged to marry Lady Winwood's cousin, Miss Natalie Graybrooke." She paused there—at the outset of the disclosure. A sudden change of expression passed over Turlington's face, which daunted her for the moment. "We have hitherto understood," she went on, "that you were to be married to that young lady early in next month."

"Well?"

He could say that one word. Looking at their pale faces, and their eager eyes, he could say no more.

"Take care!" whispered Dorothea, in her sister's ear. "Look at him, Amelia! Not too soon."

Amelia went on more carefully.

"We have just returned from a musical meeting," she said. "One of the ladies there was an

acquaintance, a former school-fellow of ours. She is the wife of the rector of St. Columb Major—a large church, far from this—at the East End of London.”

“I know nothing about the woman or the church,” interposed Turlington, sternly.

“I must beg you to wait a little. I can’t tell you what I want to tell you unless I refer to the rector’s wife. She knows Lady Winwood by name. And she heard of Lady Winwood recently under very strange circumstances—circumstances connected with a signature in one of the books of the church.”

Turlington lost his self-control. “You have got something against my Natalie,” he burst out; “I know it by your whispering, I see it in your looks! Say it at once in plain words.”

There was no trifling with him now. In plain words Amelia said it.

* * * * *

There was silence in the room. They could hear the sound of passing footsteps in the street. He stood perfectly still on the spot where they had struck him dumb by the disclosure, supporting himself with his right hand laid on the head of a sofa near him. The sisters drew back horror-struck into the furthest corner of the room. His face turned them cold. Through the mute misery which it had expressed at first, there appeared, slowly forcing its way to view, a look of deadly vengeance which froze them to the soul. They whispered feverishly one to the other, without knowing what they were talking of, without

hearing their own voices. One of them said, "Ring the bell!" Another said, "Offer him something, he will faint." The third shuddered, and repeated, over and over again, "Why did we do it? Why did we do it?"

He silenced them on the instant by speaking on his side. He came on slowly, by a step at a time, with the big drops of agony falling slowly over his rugged face. He said, in a hoarse whisper, "Write me down the name of the church—there." He held out his open pocket-book to Amelia while he spoke. She steadied herself, and wrote the address. She tried to say a word to soften him. The word died on her lips. There was a light in his eyes as they looked at her which transfigured his face to something superhuman and devilish. She turned away from him, shuddering.

He put the book back in his pocket, and passed his handkerchief over his face. After a moment of indecision, he suddenly and swiftly stole out of the room, as if he was afraid of their calling somebody in, and stopping him. At the door he turned round for a moment, and said, "You will hear how this ends. I wish you good-morning."

The door closed on him. Left by themselves, they began to realize it. They thought of the consequences when his back was turned and it was too late.

The Graybrookes! Now he knew it, what would become of the Graybrookes? What would he do when he got back? Even at ordinary

times—when he was on his best behavior—he was a rough man. What would happen? Oh, good God! what would happen when he and Natalie next stood face to face? It was a lonely house—Natalie had told them about it—no neighbors near; nobody by to interfere but the weak old father and the maiden aunt. Something ought to be done. Some steps ought to be taken to warn them. Advice—who could give advice? Who was the first person who ought to be told of what had happened? Lady Winwood? No! even at that crisis the sisters still shrank from their stepmother—still hated her with the old hatred! Not a word to *her*! They owed no duty to *her*! Who else could they appeal to? To their father? Yes! There was the person to advise them. In the meanwhile, silence toward their stepmother—silence toward every one till their father came back!

They waited and waited. One after another the precious hours, pregnant with the issues of life and death, followed each other on the dial. Lady Winwood returned alone. She had left her husband at the House of Lords. Dinner-time came, and brought with it a note from his lordship. There was a debate at the House. Lady Winwood and his daughters were not to wait dinner for him.

· TENTH SCENE.

GREEN ANCHOR LANE.

AN hour later than the time at which he had been expected, Richard Turlington appeared at his office in the city.

He met beforehand all the inquiries which the marked change in him must otherwise have provoked, by announcing that he was ill. Before he proceeded to business, he asked if anybody was waiting to see him. One of the servants from Muswell Hill was waiting with another parcel for Miss Lavinia, ordered by telegram from the country that morning. Turlington (after ascertaining the servant's name) received the man in his private room. He there heard, for the first time, that Launcelot Linzie had been lurking in the grounds (exactly as he had supposed) on the day when the lawyer took his instructions for the Settlement and the Will.

In two hours more Turlington's work was completed. On leaving the office—as soon as he was out of sight of the door—he turned eastward, instead of taking the way that led to his own house in town. Pursuing his course, he entered the labyrinth of streets which led, in that quarter of East London, to the unsavory neighborhood of the river-side.

By this time his mind was made up. The forecast shadow of meditated crime traveled be-

fore him already, as he threaded his way among his fellow-men.

He had been to the vestry of St. Columb Major, and had satisfied himself that he was misled by no false report. There was the entry in the Marriage Register. The one unexplained mystery was the mystery of Launce's conduct in permitting his wife to return to her father's house. Utterly unable to account for this proceeding, Turlington could only accept facts as they were, and determine to make the most of his time, while the woman who had deceived him was still under his roof. A hideous expression crossed his face as he realized the idea that he had got her (unprotected by her husband) in his house. "When Launcelot Linzie *does* come to claim her," he said to himself, "he shall find I have been even with him." He looked at his watch. Was it possible to save the last train and get back that night? No—the last train had gone. Would she take advantage of his absence to escape? He had little fear of it. She would never have allowed her aunt to send him to Lord Winwood's house, if she had felt the slightest suspicion of his discovering the truth in that quarter. Returning by the first train the next morning, he might feel sure of getting back in time. Meanwhile, he had the hours of the night before him. He could give his mind to the serious question that must be settled before he left London—the question of repaying the forty thousand pounds. There was but one way of getting the money now. Sir Joseph had executed his

Will; Sir Joseph's death would leave his sole executor and trustee (the lawyer had said it!) master of his fortune. Turlington determined to be master of it in four-and-twenty hours—striking the blow, without risk to himself, by means of another hand. In the face of the probabilities, in the face of the facts, he had now firmly persuaded himself that Sir Joseph was privy to the fraud that had been practiced on him. The Marriage-Settlement, the Will, the presence of the family at his country house—all these he believed to be so many stratagems invented to keep him deceived until the last moment. The truth was in those words which he had overheard between Sir Joseph and Launce—and in Launce's presence (privately encouraged, no doubt) at Muswell Hill. "Her father shall pay me for it doubly: with his purse and with his life." With that thought in his heart, Richard Turlington wound his way through the streets by the river-side, and stopped at a blind alley called Green Anchor Lane, infamous to this day as the chosen resort of the most abandoned wretches whom London can produce.

The policeman at the corner cautioned him as he turned into the alley. "They won't hurt *me!*" he answered, and walked on to a public-house at the bottom of the lane.

The landlord at the door silently recognized him, and led the way in. They crossed a room filled with sailors of all nations drinking; ascended a staircase at the back of the house, and stopped at the door of the room on the second

floor. There the landlord spoke for the first time. "He has outrun his allowance, sir, as usual. You will find him with hardly a rag on his back. I doubt if he will last much longer. He had another fit of the horrors last night, and the doctor thinks badly of him." With that introduction he opened the door, and Turlington entered the room.

On the miserable bed lay a gray-headed old man of gigantic stature, with nothing on him but a ragged shirt and a pair of patched, filthy trousers. At the side of the bed, with a bottle of gin on the rickety table between them, sat two hideous, leering, painted monsters, wearing the dress of women. The smell of opium was in the room, as well as the smell of spirits. At Turlington's appearance, the old man rose on the bed and welcomed him with greedy eyes and outstretched hand.

"Money, master!" he called out hoarsely. "A crown piece in advance, for the sake of old times!"

Turlington turned to the women without answering, purse in hand.

"His clothes are at the pawnbroker's, of course. How much?"

"Thirty shillings."

"Bring them here, and be quick about it. You will find it worth your while when you come back."

The women took the pawnbroker's tickets from the pockets of the man's trousers and hurried out.

Turlington closed the door, and seated himself by the bedside. He laid his hand familiarly on the giant's mighty shoulder, looked him full in the face, and said, in a whisper,

"Thomas Wildfang!"

The man started, and drew his huge hairy hand across his eyes, as if in doubt whether he was waking or sleeping. "It's better than ten years, master, since you called me by my name. If I am Thomas Wildfang, what are you?"

"Your captain, once more."

Thomas Wildfang sat up on the side of the bed, and spoke his next words cautiously in Turlington's ear.

"Another man in the way?"

"Yes."

The giant shook his bald, bestial head dolefully. "Too late. I'm past the job. Look here."

He held up his hand, and showed it trembling incessantly. "I'm an old man," he said, and let his hand drop heavily again on the bed beside him.

Turlington looked at the door, and whispered back,

"The man is as old as you are. And the money is worth having."

"How much?"

"A hundred pounds."

The eyes of Thomas Wildfang fastened greedily on Turlington's face. "Let's hear," he said. "Softly, captain. Let's hear."

* * * * *

When the women came back with the clothes,

Turlington had left the room. Their promised reward lay waiting for them on the table, and Thomas Wildfang was eager to dress himself and be gone. They could get but one answer from him to every question they put. He had business in hand, which was not to be delayed. They would see him again in a day or two, with money in his purse. With that assurance he took his cudgel from the corner of the room, and stalked out swiftly by the back door of the house into the night.

ELEVENTH SCENE.

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE.

THE evening was chilly, but not cold for the time of year. There was no moon. The stars were out, and the wind was quiet. Upon the whole, the inhabitants of the little Somersetshire village of Baxdale agreed that it was as fine a Christmas-eve as they could remember for some years past.

Toward eight in the evening the one small street of the village was empty, except at that part of it which was occupied by the public-house. For the most part, people gathered round their firesides, with an eye to their suppers, and watched the process of cooking comfortably indoors. The old bare, gray church, situated at some little distance from the village, looked a lonelier object than usual in the dim starlight.

The vicarage, nestling close under the shadow of the church-tower, threw no illumination of fire-light or candle-light on the dreary scene. The clergyman's shutters fitted well, and the clergyman's curtains were closely drawn. The one ray of light that cheered the wintry darkness streamed from the unguarded window of a lonely house, separated from the vicarage by the whole length of the church-yard. A man stood at the window, holding back the shutter, and looking out attentively over the dim void of the burial-ground. The man was Richard Turlington. The room in which he was watching was a room in his own house.

A momentary spark of light flashed up, as from a kindled match, in the burial-ground. Turlington instantly left the empty room in which he had been watching. Passing down the back garden of the house, and crossing a narrow lane at the bottom of it, he opened a gate in a low stone wall beyond, and entered the church-yard. The shadowy figure of a man of great stature, lurking among the graves, advanced to meet him. Midway in the dark and lonely place the two stopped and consulted together in whispers. Turlington spoke first.

"Have you taken up your quarters at the public-house in the village?"

"Yes, master."

"Did you find your way, while the daylight lasted, to the deserted malt-house behind my orchard wall?"

"Yes, master."

“Now listen—we have no time to lose. Hide there, behind that monument. Before nine o’clock to-night you will see me cross the church-yard, as far as this place, with the man you are to wait for. He is going to spend an hour with the vicar, at the house yonder. I shall stop short here, and say to him, ‘You can’t miss your way in the dark now—I will go back.’ When I am far enough away from him, I shall blow a call on my whistle. The moment you hear the call, follow the man, and drop him before he gets out of the church-yard. Have you got your cudgel?”

Thomas Wildfang held up his cudgel. Turlington took him by the arm, and felt it suspiciously.

“You have had an attack of the horrors already,” he said. “What does this trembling mean?”

He took a spirit-flask from his pocket as he spoke. Thomas Wildfang snatched it out of his hand, and emptied it at a draught. “All right now, master,” he said. Turlington felt his arm once more. It was steadier already. Wildfang brandished his cudgel, and struck a heavy blow with it on one of the turf mounds near them. “Will that drop him, captain?” he asked.

Turlington went on with his instructions.

“Rob him when you have dropped him. Take his money and his jewelry. I want to have the killing of him attributed to robbery as the motive. Make sure before you leave him that he is dead. Then go to the malt-house. There is no

fear of your being seen; all the people will be indoors, keeping Christmas-eve. You will find a change of clothes hidden in the malt-house, and an old caldron full of quicklime. Destroy the clothes you have got on, and dress yourself in the other clothes that you find. Follow the cross-road, and when it brings you into the high-road, turn to the left; a four-mile walk will take you to the town of Harminster. Sleep there to-night, and travel to London by the train in the morning. The next day go to my office, see the head clerk, and say, 'I have come to sign my receipt.' Sign it in your own name, and you will receive your hundred pounds. There are your instructions. Do you understand them?"

Wildfang nodded his head in silent token that he understood, and disappeared again among the graves. Turlington went back to the house.

He had advanced midway across the garden, when he was startled by the sound of footsteps in the lane—at that part of it which skirted one of the corners of the house. Hastening forward, he placed himself behind a projection in the wall, so as to see the person pass across the stream of light from the uncovered window of the room that he had left. The stranger was walking rapidly. All Turlington could see as he crossed the field of light was, that his hat was pulled over his eyes, and that he had a thick beard and mustache. Describing the man to the servant on entering the house, he was informed that a stranger with a large beard had been seen about the neighborhood for some days

past. The account he had given of himself stated that he was a surveyor, engaged in taking measurements for a new map of that part of the country, shortly to be published.

The guilty mind of Turlington was far from feeling satisfied with the meager description of the stranger thus rendered. He could not be engaged in surveying in the dark. What could he want in the desolate neighborhood of the house and church-yard at that time of night?

The man wanted—what the man found a little lower down the lane, hidden in a dismantled part of the church-yard wall—a letter from a young lady. Read by the light of the pocket-lantern which he carried with him, the letter first congratulated this person on the complete success of his disguise—and then promised that the writer would be ready at her bedroom window for flight the next morning, before the house was astir. The signature was “Natalie,” and the person addressed was “Dearest Launce.”

In the meanwhile, Turlington barred the window shutters of the room, and looked at his watch. It wanted only a quarter to nine o'clock. He took his dog-whistle from the chimney-piece, and turned his steps at once in the direction of the drawing-room, in which his guests were passing the evening.

TWELFTH SCENE.

INSIDE THE HOUSE.

THE scene in the drawing-room represented the ideal of domestic comfort. The fire of wood and coal mixed burned brightly; the lamps shed a soft glow of light; the solid shutters and the thick red curtains kept the cold night air on the outer side of two long windows, which opened on the back garden. Snug arm-chairs were placed in every part of the room. In one of them Sir Joseph reclined, fast asleep; in another, Miss Lavinia sat knitting; a third chair, apart from the rest, near a round table in one corner of the room, was occupied by Natalie. Her head was resting on her hand, an unread book lay open on her lap. She looked pale and harassed; anxiety and suspense had worn her down to the shadow of her former self. On entering the room, Turlington purposely closed the door with a bang. Natalie started. Miss Lavinia looked up reproachfully. The object was achieved — Sir Joseph was roused from his sleep.

“If you are going to the vicar’s to-night, Graybrooke,” said Turlington, “it’s time you were off, isn’t it?”

Sir Joseph rubbed his eyes, and looked at the clock on the mantel-piece. “Yes, yes, Richard,” he answered, drowsily, “I suppose I must go. Where is my hat?”

His sister and his daughter both joined in try-

ing to persuade him to send an excuse instead of groping his way to the vicarage in the dark. Sir Joseph hesitated, as usual. He and the vicar had run up a sudden friendship, on the strength of their common enthusiasm for the old-fashioned game of backgammon. Victorious over his opponent on the previous evening at Turlington's house, Sir Joseph had promised to pass that evening at the vicarage, and give the vicar his revenge. Observing his indecision, Turlington cunningly irritated him by affecting to believe that he was really unwilling to venture out in the dark. "I'll see you safe across the churchyard," he said; "and the vicar's servant will see you safe back." The tone in which he spoke instantly roused Sir Joseph. "I am not in my second childhood yet, Richard," he replied, testily. "I can find my way by myself." He kissed his daughter on the forehead. "No fear, Natalie. I shall be back in time for the mulled claret. No, Richard, I won't trouble you." He kissed his hand to his sister and went out into the hall for his hat: Turlington following him with a rough apology, and asking as a favor to be permitted to accompany him part of the way only. The ladies, left behind in the drawing-room, heard the apology accepted by kind-hearted Sir Joseph. The two went out together.

"Have you noticed Richard since his return?" asked Miss Lavinia. "I fancy he must have heard bad news in London. He looks as if he had something on his mind."

"I haven't remarked it, aunt."

For the time, no more was said. Miss Lavinia went monotonously on with her knitting. Natalie pursued her own anxious thoughts over the unread pages of the book in her lap. Suddenly the deep silence out of doors and in was broken by a shrill whistle, sounding from the direction of the church-yard. Natalie started with a faint cry of alarm. Miss Lavinia looked up from her knitting.

“My dear child, your nerves must be sadly out of order. What is there to be frightened at?”

“I am not very well, aunt. It is so still here at night, the slightest noises startle me.”

There was another interval of silence. It was past nine o'clock when they heard the back door opened and closed again. Turlington came hurriedly into the drawing-room, as if he had some reason for wishing to rejoin the ladies as soon as possible. To the surprise of both of them, he sat down abruptly in the corner, with his face to the wall, and took up the newspaper, without casting a look at them or uttering a word.

“Is Joseph safe at the vicarage?” asked Miss Lavinia.

“All right.” He gave the answer in a short, surly tone, still without looking round.

Miss Lavinia tried him again. “Did you hear a whistle while you were out? It quite startled Natalie in the stillness of this place.”

He turned half-way round. “My shepherd, I suppose,” he said after a pause—“whistling for his dog.” He turned back again and immersed himself in his newspaper.

Miss Lavinia beckoned to her niece and pointed significantly to Turlington. After one reluctant look at him, Natalie laid her head wearily on her aunt's shoulder. "Sleepy, my dear?" whispered the old lady. "Uneasy, aunt—I don't know why," Natalie whispered back. "I would give the world to be in London, and to hear the carriages going by, and the people talking in the street."

Turlington suddenly dropped his newspaper. "What's the secret between you two?" he called out roughly. "What are you whispering about?"

"We wish not to disturb you over your reading, that is all," said Miss Lavinia, coldly. "Has anything happened to vex you, Richard?"

"What the devil makes you think that?"

The old lady was offended, and showed it by saying nothing more. Natalie nestled closer to her aunt. One after another the clock ticked off the minutes with painful distinctness in the stillness of the room. Turlington suddenly threw aside the newspaper and left his corner. "Let's be good friends!" he burst out, with a clumsy assumption of gayety. "This isn't keeping Christmas-eve. Let's talk and be sociable. Dearest Natalie!" He threw his arm roughly round Natalie, and drew her by main force away from her aunt. She turned deadly pale, and struggled to release herself. "I am suffering—I am ill—let me go!" He was deaf to her entreaties. "What! your husband that is to be, treated in this way? Mustn't I have a kiss?—I will!" He held her closer with one hand, and,

seizing her head with the other, tried to turn her lips to him. She resisted with the inbred nervous strength which the weakest woman living has in reserve when she is outraged. Half indignant, half terrified, at Turlington's roughness, Miss Lavinia rose to interfere. In a moment more he would have had two women to overpower instead of one, when a noise outside the window suddenly suspended the ignoble struggle.

There was a sound of footsteps on the gravel-walk which ran between the house wall and the garden lawn. It was followed by a tap—a single faint tap, no more—on one of the panes of glass.

They all three stood still. For a moment more nothing was audible. Then there was a heavy shock, as of something falling outside. Then a groan, then another interval of silence—a long silence, interrupted no more.

Turlington's arm dropped from Natalie. She drew back to her aunt. Looking at him instinctively, in the natural expectation that he would take the lead in penetrating the mystery of what had happened outside the window, the two women were thunderstruck to see that he was, to all appearance, even more startled and more helpless than they were. "Richard," said Miss Lavinia, pointing to the window, "there is something wrong out there. See what it is." He stood motionless, as if he had not heard her, his eyes fixed on the window, his face livid with terror.

The silence outside was broken once more; this time by a call for help.

A cry of horror burst from Natalie. The voice outside—rising wildly, then suddenly dying away again—was not entirely strange to *her* ears. She tore aside the curtain. With voice and hand she roused her aunt to help her. The two lifted the heavy bar from its socket; they opened the shutters and the window. The cheerful light of the room flowed out over the body of a prostrate man, lying on his face. They turned the man over. Natalie lifted his head.

Her father!

His face was bedabbled with blood. A wound, a frightful wound, was visible on the side of his bare head, high above the ear. He looked at her, his eyes recognized her, before he fainted again in her arms. His hands and his clothes were covered with earth stains. He must have traversed some distance; in that dreadful condition he must have faltered and fallen more than once before he reached the house. His sister wiped the blood from his face. His daughter called on him frantically to forgive her before he died—the harmless, gentle, kind-hearted father, who had never said a hard word to her! The father whom she had deceived!

The terrified servants hurried into the room. Their appearance roused their master from the extraordinary stupor that had seized him. He was at the window before the footman could get there. The two lifted Sir Joseph into the room, and laid him on the sofa. Natalie knelt by him, supporting his head. Miss Lavinia stanchd the flowing blood with her handkerchief. The

women-servants brought linen and cold water. The man hurried away for the doctor, who lived on the other side of the village. Left alone again with Turlington, Natalie noticed that his eyes were fixed in immovable scrutiny on her father's head. He never said a word. He looked, looked, looked at the wound.

The doctor arrived. Before either the daughter or the sister of the injured man could put the question, Turlington put it—"Will he live or die?"

The doctor's careful finger probed the wound.

"Make your minds easy. A little lower down, or in front, the blow might have been serious. As it is, there is no harm done. Keep him quiet, and he will be all right again in two or three days."

Hearing those welcome words, Natalie and her aunt sank on their knees in silent gratitude. After dressing the wound, the doctor looked round for the master of the house. Turlington, who had been so breathlessly eager but a few minutes since, seemed to have lost all interest in the case now. He stood apart, at the window, looking out toward the church-yard, thinking. The questions which it was the doctor's duty to ask were answered by the ladies. The servants assisted in examining the injured man's clothes: they discovered that his watch and purse were both missing. When it became necessary to carry him upstairs, it was the footman who assisted the doctor. The footman's master, without a word of explanation, walked out bare-

headed into the back garden, on the search, as the doctor and the servants supposed, for some trace of the robber who had attempted Sir Joseph's life.

His absence was hardly noticed at the time. The difficulty of conveying the wounded man to his room absorbed the attention of all the persons present.

Sir Joseph partially recovered his senses while they were taking him up the steep and narrow stairs. Carefully as they carried the patient, the motion wrung a groan from him before they reached the top. The bedroom corridor, in the rambling, irregularly built house, rose and fell on different levels. At the door of the first bed-chamber the doctor asked a little anxiously if that was the room. No; there were three more stairs to go down, and a corner to turn, before they could reach it. The first room was Natalie's. She instantly offered it for her father's use. The doctor (seeing that it was the airiest as well as the nearest room) accepted the proposal. Sir Joseph had been laid comfortably in his daughter's bed; the doctor had just left them, with renewed assurances that they need feel no anxiety, when they heard a heavy step below stairs. Turlington had re-entered the house.

(He had been looking, as they had supposed, for the ruffian who had attacked Sir Joseph; with a motive, however, for the search at which it was impossible for other persons to guess. His own safety was now bound up in the safety of Thomas Wildfang. As soon as he was out of

sight in the darkness, he made straight for the malt-house. The change of clothes was there untouched; not a trace of his accomplice was to be seen. Where else to look for him it was impossible to tell. Turlington had no alternative but to go back to the house, and ascertain if suspicion had been aroused in his absence.)

He had only to ascend the stairs, and to see, through the open door, that Sir Joseph had been placed in his daughter's room.

“What does this mean?” he asked, roughly.

Before it was possible to answer him the footman appeared with a message. The doctor had come back to the door to say that he would take on himself the necessary duty of informing the constable of what had happened, on his return to the village. Turlington started and changed color. If Wildfang was found by others, and questioned in his employer's absence, serious consequences might follow. “The constable is my business,” said Turlington, hurriedly descending the stairs; “I'll go with the doctor.” They heard him open the door below, then close it again (as if some sudden thought had struck him), and call to the footman. The house was badly provided with servants' bedrooms. The women-servants only slept indoors. The footman occupied a room over the stables. Natalie and her aunt heard Turlington dismiss the man for the night, an hour earlier than usual at least. His next proceeding was stranger still. Looking cautiously over the stairs, Natalie saw him lock all the doors on the ground-floor and take out the

keys. When he went away, she heard him lock the front door behind him. Incredible as it seemed, there could be no doubt of the fact—the inmates of the house were imprisoned till he came back. What did it mean?

(It meant that Turlington's vengeance still remained to be wreaked on the woman who had deceived him. It meant that Sir Joseph's life still stood between the man who had compassed his death and the money which the man was resolved to have. It meant that Richard Turlington was driven to bay, and that the horror and the peril of the night were not at an end yet.)

Natalie and her aunt looked at each other across the bed on which Sir Joseph lay. He had fallen into a kind of doze; no enlightenment could come to them from *him*. They could only ask each other, with beating hearts and baffled minds, what Richard's conduct meant—they could only feel instinctively that some dreadful discovery was hanging over them. The aunt was the calmer of the two—there was no secret weighing heavily on *her* conscience. *She* could feel the consolations of religion. "Our dear one is spared to us, my love," said the old lady, gently. "God has been good to us. We are in his hands. If we know that, we know enough."

As she spoke there was a loud ring at the door-bell. The women-servants crowded into the bedroom in alarm. Strong in numbers, and encouraged by Natalie—who roused herself and led the way—they confronted the risk of opening the window and of venturing out on the balcony

which extended along that side of the house. A man was dimly visible below. He called to them in thick, unsteady accents. The servants recognized him: he was the telegraphic messenger from the railway. They went down to speak to him—and returned with a telegram which had been pushed in under the door. The distance from the station was considerable; the messenger had been “keeping Christmas” in more than one beer-shop on his way to the house; and the delivery of the telegram had been delayed for some hours. It was addressed to Natalie. She opened it—looked at it—dropped it—and stood speechless; her lips parted in horror, her eyes staring vacantly straight before her.

Miss Lavinia took the telegram from the floor, and read these lines:

“Lady Winwood, Hertford Street, London. To Natalie Graybrooke, Church Meadows, Baxdale, Somersetshire. Dreadful news. R. T. has discovered your marriage to Launce. The truth has been kept from me till to-day (24th). Instant flight with your husband is your only chance. I would have communicated with Launce, but I do not know his address. You will receive this, I hope and believe, before R. T. can return to Somersetshire. Telegraph back, I entreat you, to say that you are safe. I shall follow my message if I do not hear from you in reasonable time.”

Miss Lavinia lifted her gray head, and looked at her niece. “Is this true?” she said—and pointed to the venerable face laid back, white,

on the white pillow of the bed. Natalie sank forward as her eyes met the eyes of her aunt. Miss Lavinia saved her from falling insensible on the floor.

* * * * *

The confession had been made. The words of penitence and the words of pardon had been spoken. The peaceful face of the father still lay hushed in rest. One by one the minutes succeeded each other uneventfully in the deep tranquillity of the night. It was almost a relief when the silence was disturbed once more by another sound outside the house. A pebble was thrown up at the window, and a voice called out cautiously, "Miss Lavinia!"

They recognized the voice of the man-servant, and at once opened the window.

He had something to say to the ladies in private. How could he say it? A domestic circumstance which had been marked by Launce, as favorable to the contemplated elopement, was now noticed by the servant as lending itself readily to effecting the necessary communication with the ladies. The lock of the gardener's tool-house (in the shrubbery close by) was under repair; and the gardener's ladder was accessible to any one who wanted it. At the short height of the balcony from the ground, the ladder was more than long enough for the purpose required. In a few minutes the servant had mounted to the balcony, and could speak to Natalie and her aunt at the window.

"I can't rest quiet," said the man. "I'm off

on the sly to see what's going on down in the village. It's hard on ladies like you to be locked in here. Is there anything I can do for either of you?"

Natalie took up Lady Winwood's telegram. "Launce ought to see this," she said to her aunt. "He will be here at daybreak," she added, in a whisper, "if I don't tell him what has happened."

Miss Lavinia turned pale. "If he and Richard meet—" she began. "Tell him!" she added, hurriedly—"tell him before it is too late!"

Natalie wrote a few lines (addressed to Launce in his assumed name at his lodgings in the village) inclosing Lady Winwood's telegram, and entreating him to do nothing rash. When the servant had disappeared with the letter, there was one hope in her mind and in her aunt's mind, which each was ashamed to acknowledge to the other—the hope that Launce would face the very danger that they dreaded for him, and come to the house.

They had not been long alone again, when Sir Joseph drowsily opened his eyes and asked what they were doing in his room. They told him gently that he was ill. He put his hand up to his head, and said they were right, and so dropped off again into slumber. Worn out by the emotions through which they had passed, the two women silently waited for the march of events. The same stupor of resignation possessed them both. They had secured the door and the window. They had prayed together. They had kissed the quiet face on the pillow.

They had said to each other, "We will live with him or die with him as God pleases." Miss Lavinia sat by the bedside. Natalie was on a stool at her feet—with her eyes closed, and her head on her aunt's knee.

Time went on. The clock in the hall had struck—ten or eleven, they were not sure which—when they heard the signal which warned them of the servant's return from the village. He brought news, and more than news; he brought a letter from Launce.

Natalie read these lines:

"I shall be with you, dearest, almost as soon as you receive this. The bearer will tell you what has happened in the village—your note throws a new light on it all. I only remain behind to go to the vicar (who is also the magistrate here), and declare myself your husband. All disguise must be at an end now. My place is with you and yours. It is even worse than your worst fears. Turlington was at the bottom of the attack on your father. Judge if you have not need of your husband's protection after that!—L."

Natalie handed the letter to her aunt, and pointed to the sentence which asserted Turlington's guilty knowledge of the attempt on Sir Joseph's life. In silent horror the two women looked at each other, recalling what had happened earlier in the evening, and understanding it now. The servant roused them to a sense of

present things, by entering on the narrative of his discoveries in the village.

The place was all astir when he reached it. An old man—a stranger in Baxdale—had been found lying in the road, close to the church, in a fit; and the person who had discovered him had been no other than Launce himself. He had, literally, stumbled over the body of Thomas Wildfang in the dark, on his way back to his lodgings in the village.

“The gentleman gave the alarm, miss,” said the servant, describing the event, as it had been related to him, “and the man—a huge, big old man—was carried to the inn. The landlord identified him; he had taken lodgings at the inn that day, and the constable found valuable property on him—a purse of money and a gold watch and chain. There was nothing to show who the money and the watch belonged to. It was only when my master and the doctor got to the inn that it was known whom he had robbed and tried to murder. All he let out in his wanderings before they came was that some person had set him on to do it. He called the person ‘Captain,’ and sometimes ‘Captain Goward.’ It was thought—if you could trust the ravings of a madman—that the fit took him while he was putting his hand on Sir Joseph’s heart to feel if it had stopped beating. A sort of vision (as I understand it) must have overpowered him at the moment. They tell me he raved about the sea bursting into the church-yard, and a drowning sailor floating by on a hen-coop; a sailor

who dragged him down to hell by the hair of his head, and such like horrible nonsense, miss. He was still screeching, at the worst of the fit, when my master and the doctor came into the room. At sight of one or other of them—it is thought of Mr. Turlington, seeing that he came first—he held his peace on a sudden, and then fell back in convulsions in the arms of the men who were holding him. The doctor gave it a learned name, signifying drink-madness, and said the case was hopeless. However, he ordered the room to be cleared of the crowd to see what he could do. My master was reported to be still with the doctor, waiting to see whether the man lived or died, when I left the village, miss, with the gentleman's answer to your note. I didn't dare stay to hear how it ended, for fear of Mr. Turlington's finding me out."

Having reached the end of his narrative, the man looked round restlessly toward the window. It was impossible to say when his master might not return, and it might be as much as his life was worth to be caught in the house after he had been locked out of it. He begged permission to open the window, and make his escape back to the stables while there was still time. As he unbarred the shutter they were startled by a voice hailing them from below. It was Launce's voice calling to Natalie. The servant disappeared, and Natalie was in Launce's arms before she could breathe again.

For one delicious moment she let her head lie on his breast; then she suddenly pushed him

away from her. "Why do you come here? He will kill you if he finds you in the house. Where is he?"

Launce knew even less of Turlington's movements than the servant. "Wherever he is, thank God, I am here before him!" That was all the answer he could give.

Natalie and her aunt heard him in silent dismay. Sir Joseph woke, and recognized Launce before a word more could be said. "Ah, my dear boy!" he murmured, faintly. "It's pleasant to see you again. How do you come here?" He was quite satisfied with the first excuse that suggested itself. "We'll talk about it to-morrow," he said, and composed himself to rest again.

Natalie made a second attempt to persuade Launce to leave the house.

"We don't know what may have happened," she said. "He may have followed you on your way here. He may have purposely let you enter his house. Leave us while you have the chance."

Miss Lavinia added her persuasions. They were useless. Launce quietly closed the heavy window-shutters, lined with iron, and put up the bar. Natalie wrung her hands in despair.

"Have you been to the magistrate?" she asked. "Tell us, at least, are you here by his advice? Is he coming to help us?"

Launce hesitated. If he had told the truth, he must have acknowledged that he was there in direct opposition to the magistrate's advice. He answered evasively, "If the vicar doesn't

come, the doctor will. I have told him Sir Joseph must be moved. Cheer up, Natalie! The doctor will be here as soon as Turlington."

As the name passed his lips—without a sound outside to prepare them for what was coming—the voice of Turlington himself suddenly penetrated into the room, speaking close behind the window, on the outer side.

"You have broken into my house in the night," said the voice. "And you don't escape *this* way."

Miss Lavinia sank on her knees. Natalie flew to her father. His eyes were wide open in terror; he moaned, feebly recognizing the voice. The next sound that was heard was the sound made by the removal of the ladder from the balcony. Turlington, having descended by it, had taken it away. Natalie had but too accurately guessed what would happen. The death of the villain's accomplice had freed him from all apprehension in that quarter. He had deliberately dogged Launce's steps, and had deliberately allowed him to put himself in the wrong by effecting a secret entrance into the house.

There was an interval—a horrible interval—and then they heard the front door opened. Without stopping (judging by the absence of sound) to close it again, Turlington rapidly ascended the stairs and tried the locked door.

"Come out, and give yourself up!" he called through the door. "I have got my revolver with me, and I have a right to fire on a man who has broken into my house. If the door

isn't opened before I count three, your blood be on your own head. One!"

Launce was armed with nothing but his stick. He advanced, without an instant's hesitation, to give himself up. Natalie threw her arms round him and clasped him fast before he could reach the door.

"Two!" cried the voice outside, as Launce struggled to force her from him. At the same moment his eye turned toward the bed. It was exactly opposite the door—it was straight in the line of fire! Sir Joseph's life (as Turlington had deliberately calculated) was actually in greater danger than Launce's life. He tore himself free, rushed to the bed, and took the old man in his arms to lift him out.

"Three!"

The crash of the report sounded. The bullet came through the door, grazed Launce's left arm, and buried itself in the pillow, at the very place on which Sir Joseph's head had rested the moment before. Launce had saved his father-in-law's life. Turlington had fired his first shot for the money, and had not got it yet.

They were safe in the corner of the room, on the same side as the door—Sir Joseph, helpless as a child, in Launce's arms; the women pale, but admirably calm. They were safe for the moment, when the second bullet (fired at an angle) tore its way through the wall on their right hand.

"I hear you," cried the voice of the miscreant

on the other side of the door. "I'll have you yet—through the wall."

There was a pause. They heard his hand sounding the wall, to find out where there was solid wood in the material of which it was built, and where there was plaster only. At that dreadful moment Launce's composure never left him. He laid Sir Joseph softly on the floor, and signed to Natalie and her aunt to lie down by him in silence. Their lives depended now on neither their voices nor their movements telling the murderer where to fire. He chose his place. The barrel of the revolver grated as he laid it against the wall. He touched the hair trigger. A faint *click* was the only sound that followed. The third barrel had missed fire.

They heard him ask himself, with an oath, "What's wrong with it now?"

There was a pause of silence.

Was he examining the weapon?

Before they could ask themselves the question, the report of the exploding charge burst on their ears. It was instantly followed by a heavy fall. They looked at the opposite wall of the room. No sign of a bullet there or anywhere.

Launce signed to them not to move yet. They waited, and listened. Nothing stirred on the landing outside.

Suddenly there was a disturbance of the silence in the lower regions—a clamor of many voices at the open house door. Had the firing of the revolver been heard at the vicarage? Yes! They recognized the vicar's voice among

the others. A moment more, and they heard a general exclamation of horror on the stairs. Launce opened the door of the room. He instantly closed it again before Natalie could follow him.

The dead body of Turlington lay on the landing outside. The charge in the fourth barrel of the revolver had exploded while he was looking at it. The bullet had entered his mouth and killed him on the spot.

DOCUMENTARY HINTS, IN CONCLUSION.

FIRST HINT.

(Derived from Lady Winwood's Card-Rack.)

“Sir Joseph Graybrooke and Miss Graybrooke request the honor of Lord and Lady Winwood's company to dinner, on Wednesday, February 10, at half-past seven o'clock. To meet Mr. and Mrs. Launcelot Linzie on their return.”

SECOND HINT.

(Derived from a recent Money Article in a morning Newspaper.)

“We are requested to give the fullest contradiction to unfavorable rumors lately in circula-

tion respecting the firm of Pizzituti, Turlington, and Branca. Some temporary derangement in the machinery of the business was undoubtedly produced in consequence of the sudden death of the lamented managing partner, Mr. Turlington, by the accidental discharge of a revolver which he was examining. Whatever temporary obstacles may have existed are now overcome. We are informed, on good authority, that the well-known house of Messrs. Bulpit Brothers has an interest in the business, and will carry it on until further notice."

END OF "MISS OR MRS.?"

THE FROZEN DEEP.

FIRST SCENE.—THE BALL-ROOM.

CHAPTER I.

THE date is between twenty and thirty years ago. The place is an English sea-port. The time is night. And the business of the moment is—dancing.

The Mayor and Corporation of the town are giving a grand ball, in celebration of the departure of an Arctic expedition from their port. The ships of the expedition are two in number—the *Wanderer* and the *Sea-mew*. They are to sail (in search of the Northwest Passage) on the next day, with the morning tide.

Honor to the Mayor and Corporation! It is a brilliant ball. The band is complete. The room is spacious. The large conservatory opening out of it is pleasantly lighted with Chinese lanterns, and beautifully decorated with shrubs and flowers. All officers of the army and navy who are present wear their uniforms in honor of the occasion. Among the ladies, the display of

dresses (a subject which the men don't understand) is bewildering—and the average of beauty (a subject which the men do understand) is the highest average attainable, in all parts of the room.

For the moment, the dance which is in progress is a quadrille. General admiration selects two of the ladies who are dancing as its favorite objects. One is a dark beauty in the prime of womanhood—the wife of First Lieutenant Crayford, of the *Wanderer*. The other is a young girl, pale and delicate; dressed simply in white; with no ornament on her head but her own lovely brown hair. This is Miss Clara Burnham—an orphan. She is Mrs. Crayford's dearest friend, and she is to stay with Mrs. Crayford during the lieutenant's absence in the Arctic regions. She is now dancing, with the lieutenant himself for partner, and with Mrs. Crayford and Captain Holding (commanding officer of the *Wanderer*) for *vis-à-vis*—in plain English, for opposite couple.

The conversation between Captain Holding and Mrs. Crayford, in one of the intervals of the dance, turns on Miss Burnham. The captain is greatly interested in Clara. He admires her beauty; but he thinks her manner—for a young girl—strangely serious and subdued. Is she in delicate health?

Mrs. Crayford shakes her head; sighs mysteriously; and answers,

“In *very* delicate health, Captain Holding.”

“Consumptive?”

“Not in the least.”

“I am glad to hear that. She is a charming creature, Mrs. Crayford. She interests me indescribably. If I was only twenty years younger—perhaps (as I am *not* twenty years younger) I had better not finish the sentence? Is it indiscreet, my dear lady, to inquire what *is* the matter with her?”

“It might be indiscreet, on the part of a stranger,” said Mrs. Crayford. “An old friend like you may make any inquiries. I wish I could tell you what is the matter with Clara. It is a mystery to the doctors themselves. Some of the mischief is due, in my humble opinion, to the manner in which she has been brought up.”

“Ay! ay! A bad school, I suppose.”

“Very bad, Captain Holding. But not the sort of school which you have in your mind at this moment. Clara’s early years were spent in a lonely old house in the Highlands of Scotland. The ignorant people about her were the people who did the mischief which I have just been speaking of. They filled her mind with the superstitions which are still respected as truths in the wild North—especially the superstition called the Second Sight.”

“God bless me!” cried the captain, “you don’t mean to say she believes in such stuff as that? In these enlightened times too!”

Mrs. Crayford looked at her partner with a satirical smile.

“In these enlightened times, Captain Holding, we only believe in dancing tables, and in messages sent from the other world by spirits who

can't spell! By comparison with such superstitions as these, even the Second Sight has something—in the shape of poetry—to recommend it, surely? Estimate for yourself," she continued seriously, "the effect of such surroundings as I have described on a delicate, sensitive young creature—a girl with a naturally imaginative temperament, leading a lonely, neglected life. Is it so very surprising that she should catch the infection of the superstition about her? And is it quite incomprehensible that her nervous system should suffer accordingly, at a very critical period of her life?"

"Not at all, Mrs. Crayford—not at all, ma'am, as you put it. Still it *is* a little startling, to a commonplace man like me, to meet a young lady at a ball who believes in the Second Sight. Does she really profess to see into the future? Am I to understand that she positively falls into a trance, and sees people in distant countries, and foretells events to come? That is the Second Sight, is it not?"

"That is the Second Sight, captain. And that is, really and positively, what she does."

"The young lady who is dancing opposite to us?"

"The young lady who is dancing opposite to us."

The captain waited a little—letting the new flood of information which had poured in on him settle itself steadily in his mind. This process accomplished, the Arctic explorer proceeded resolutely on his way to further discoveries.

“May I ask, ma’am, if you have ever seen her in a state of trance with your own eyes?” he inquired.

“My sister and I both saw her in the trance, little more than a month since,” Mrs. Crayford replied. “She had been nervous and irritable all the morning; and we took her out into the garden to breathe the fresh air. Suddenly, without any reason for it, the color left her face. She stood between us, insensible to touch, insensible to sound; motionless as stone, and cold as death in a moment. The first change we noticed came after a lapse of some minutes. Her hands began to move slowly, as if she was groping in the dark. Words dropped one by one from her lips, in a lost, vacant tone, as if she was talking in her sleep. Whether what she said referred to past or future I cannot tell you. She spoke of persons in a foreign country—perfect strangers to my sister and to me. After a little interval, she suddenly became silent. A momentary color appeared in her face, and left it again. Her eyes closed—her feet failed her—and she sank insensible into our arms.”

“Sank insensible into your arms,” repeated the captain, absorbing his new information. “Most extraordinary! And—in this state of health—she goes out to parties, and dances. More extraordinary still!”

“You are entirely mistaken,” said Mrs. Crayford. “She is only here to-night to please me; and she is only dancing to please my husband. As a rule, she shuns all society. The doctor rec-

ommends change and amusement for her. She won't listen to him. Except on rare occasions like this, she persists in remaining at home."

Captain Holding brightened at the allusion to the doctor. Something practical might be got out of the doctor. Scientific man. Sure to see this very obscure subject under a new light. "How does it strike the doctor now?" said the captain. "Viewed simply as a Case, ma'am, how does it strike the doctor?"

"He will give no positive opinion," Mrs. Crayford answered. "He told me that such cases as Clara's were by no means unfamiliar to medical practice. 'We know,' he told me, 'that certain disordered conditions of the brain and the nervous system produce results quite as extraordinary as any that you have described—and there our knowledge ends. Neither my science nor any man's science can clear up the mystery in this case. It is an especially difficult case to deal with, because Miss Burnham's early associations dispose her to attach a superstitious importance to the malady—the hysterical malady as some doctors would call it—from which she suffers. I can give you instructions for preserving her general health; and I can recommend you to try some change in her life—provided you first relieve her mind of any secret anxieties that may possibly be preying on it.'"

The captain smiled self-approvingly. The doctor had justified his anticipations. The doctor had suggested a practical solution of the difficulty.

“Ay! ay! At last we have hit the nail on the head! Secret anxieties. Yes! yes! Plain enough now. A disappointment in love—eh, Mrs. Crayford?”

“I don’t know, Captain Holding; I am quite in the dark. Clara’s confidence in me—in other matters unbounded—is, in this matter of her (supposed) anxieties, a confidence still withheld. In all else we are like sisters. I sometimes fear there may indeed be some trouble preying secretly on her mind. I sometimes feel a little hurt at her incomprehensible silence.”

Captain Holding was ready with his own practical remedy for this difficulty.

“Encouragement is all she wants, ma’am. Take my word for it, this matter rests entirely with you. It’s all in a nutshell. Encourage her to confide in you—and she *will* confide.”

“I am waiting to encourage her, captain, until she is left alone with me—after you have all sailed for the Arctic seas. In the meantime, will you consider what I have said to you as intended for your ear only? And will you forgive me, if I own that the turn the subject has taken does not tempt me to pursue it any further?”

The captain took the hint. He instantly changed the subject; choosing, on this occasion, safe professional topics. He spoke of ships that were ordered on foreign service; and, finding that these as subjects failed to interest Mrs. Crayford, he spoke next of ships that were ordered home again. This last experiment pro-

duced its effect—an effect which the captain had not bargained for.

“Do you know,” he began, “that the *Atalanta* is expected back from the West Coast of Africa every day? Have you any acquaintances among the officers of that ship?”

As it so happened, he put those questions to Mrs. Crayford while they were engaged in one of the figures of the dance which brought them within hearing of the opposite couple. At the same moment—to the astonishment of her friends and admirers—Miss Clara Burnham threw the quadrille into confusion by making a mistake! Everybody waited to see her set the mistake right. She made no attempt to set it right—she turned deadly pale and caught her partner by the arm.

“The heat!” she said, faintly. “Take me away—take me into the air!”

Lieutenant Crayford instantly led her out of the dance, and took her into the cool and empty conservatory, at the end of the room. As a matter of course, Captain Holding and Mrs. Crayford left the quadrille at the same time. The captain saw his way to a joke.

“Is this the trance coming on?” he whispered. “If it is, as commander of the Arctic expedition, I have a particular request to make. Will the Second Sight oblige me by seeing the shortest way to the Northwest Passage, before we leave England?”

Mrs. Crayford declined to humor the joke. “If you will excuse my leaving you,” she said

quietly, "I will try and find out what is the matter with Miss Burnham."

At the entrance to the conservatory, Mrs. Crayford encountered her husband. The lieutenant was of middle age, tall and comely. A man with a winning simplicity and gentleness in his manner, and an irresistible kindness in his brave blue eyes. In one word, a man whom everybody loved—including his wife.

"Don't be alarmed," said the lieutenant. "The heat has overcome her—that's all."

Mrs. Crayford shook her head, and looked at her husband, half satirically, half fondly.

"You dear old innocent!" she exclaimed, "that excuse may do for you. For my part, I don't believe a word of it. Go and get another partner, and leave Clara to me."

She entered the conservatory and seated herself by Clara's side.

CHAPTER II.

"Now, my dear!" Mrs. Crayford began, "what does this mean?"

"Nothing."

"That won't do, Clara. Try again."

"The heat of the room—"

"That won't do, either. Say that you choose to keep your own secrets, and I shall understand what you mean."

Clara's sad, clear gray eyes looked up for the

first time in Mrs. Crayford's face, and suddenly became dimmed with tears.

"If I only dared tell you!" she murmured. "I hold so to your good opinion of me, Lucy—and I am so afraid of losing it."

Mrs. Crayford's manner changed. Her eyes rested gravely and anxiously on Clara's face.

"You know as well as I do that nothing can shake my affection for you," she said. "Do justice, my child, to your old friend. There is nobody here to listen to what we say. Open your heart, Clara. I see you are in trouble, and I want to comfort you."

Clara began to yield. In other words, she began to make conditions.

"Will you promise to keep what I tell you a secret from every living creature?" she began.

Mrs. Crayford met that question, by putting a question on her side.

"Does 'every living creature' include my husband?"

"Your husband more than anybody! I love him, I revere him. He is so noble; he is so good! If I told him what I am going to tell you, he would despise me. Own it plainly, Lucy, if I am asking too much in asking you to keep a secret from your husband."

"Nonsense, child! When you are married, you will know that the easiest of all secrets to keep is a secret from your husband. I give you my promise. Now begin!"

Clara hesitated painfully.

"I don't know how to begin!" she exclaimed,

with a burst of despair. "The words won't come to me."

"Then I must help you. Do you feel ill to-night? Do you feel as you felt that day when you were with my sister and me in the garden?"

"Oh no."

"You are not ill, you are not really affected by the heat—and yet you turn as pale as ashes, and you are obliged to leave the quadrille! There must be some reason for this."

"There *is* a reason. Captain Holding—"

"Captain Holding! What in the name of wonder has the captain to do with it?"

"He told you something about the *Atalanta*. He said the *Atalanta* was expected back from Africa immediately."

"Well, and what of that? Is there anybody in whom you are interested coming home in the ship?"

"Somebody whom I am afraid of is coming home in the ship."

Mrs. Crayford's magnificent black eyes opened wide in amazement.

"My dear Clara! do you really mean what you say?"

"Wait a little, Lucy, and you shall judge for yourself. We must go back—if I am to make you understand me—to the year before we knew each other—to the last year of my father's life. Did I ever tell you that my father moved southward, for the sake of his health, to a house in Kent that was lent to him by a friend?"

“No, my dear; I don’t remember ever hearing of the house in Kent. Tell me about it.”

“There is nothing to tell, except this: the new house was near a fine country-seat standing in its own park. The owner of the place was a gentleman named Wardour. He, too, was one of my father’s Kentish friends. He had an only son.”

She paused, and played nervously with her fan. Mrs. Crayford looked at her attentively. Clara’s eyes remained fixed on her fan—Clara said no more. “What was the son’s name?” asked Mrs. Crayford, quietly.

“Richard.”

“Am I right, Clara, in suspecting that Mr. Richard Wardour admired you?”

The question produced its intended effect. The question helped Clara to go on.

“I hardly knew at first,” she said, “whether he admired me or not. He was very strange in his ways—headstrong, terribly headstrong and passionate; but generous and affectionate in spite of his faults of temper. Can you understand such a character?”

“Such characters exist by thousands. I have my faults of temper. I begin to like Richard already. Go on.”

“The days went by, Lucy, and the weeks went by. We were thrown very much together. I began, little by little, to have some suspicion of the truth.”

“And Richard helped to confirm your suspicions, of course?”

“No. He was not—unhappily for me—he was not that sort of man. He never spoke of the feeling with which he regarded me. It was I who saw it. I couldn’t help seeing it. I did all I could to show that I was willing to be a sister to him, and that I could never be anything else. He did not understand me, or he would not, I can’t say which.”

“‘Would not,’ is the most likely, my dear. Go on.”

“It might have been as you say. There was a strange, rough bashfulness about him. He confused and puzzled me. He never spoke out. He seemed to treat me as if our future lives had been provided for while we were children. What could I do, Lucy?”

“Do? You could have asked your father to end the difficulty for you.”

“Impossible! You forget what I have just told you. My father was suffering at that time under the illness which afterward caused his death. He was quite unfit to interfere.”

“Was there no one else who could help you?”

“No one.”

“No lady in whom you could confide?”

“I had acquaintances among the ladies in the neighborhood. I had no friends.”

“What did you do, then?”

“Nothing. I hesitated; I put off coming to an explanation with him, unfortunately, until it was too late.”

“What do you mean by too late?”

“You shall hear. I ought to have told you that Richard Wardour is in the navy—”

“Indeed! I am more interested in him than ever. Well?”

“One spring day Richard came to our house to take leave of us before he joined his ship. I thought he was gone, and I went into the next room. It was my own sitting-room, and it opened on to the garden.”——“Yes?”

“Richard must have been watching me. He suddenly appeared in the garden. Without waiting for me to invite him, he walked into the room. I was a little startled as well as surprised, but I managed to hide it. I said, ‘What is it, Mr. Wardour?’ He stepped close up to me; he said, in his quick, rough way: ‘Clara! I am going to the African coast. If I live, I shall come back promoted; and we both know what will happen then.’ He kissed me. I was half frightened, half angry. Before I could compose myself to say a word, he was out in the garden again—he was gone! I ought to have spoken, I know. It was not honorable, not kind toward *him*. You can’t reproach me for my want of courage and frankness more bitterly than I reproach myself!”

“My dear child, I don’t reproach you. I only think you might have written to him.”

“I did write.”

“Plainly?”

“Yes. I told him in so many words that he was deceiving himself, and that I could never marry him.”

“Plain enough, in all conscience! Having said that, surely you are not to blame. What are you fretting about now?”

“Suppose my letter has never reached him?”

“Why should you suppose anything of the sort?”

“What I wrote required an answer, Lucy—*asked* for an answer. The answer has never come. What is the plain conclusion? My letter has never reached him. And the *Atalanta* is expected back! Richard Wardour is returning to England—Richard Wardour will claim me as his wife! You wondered just now if I really meant what I said. Do you doubt it still?”

Mrs. Crayford leaned back absently in her chair. For the first time since the conversation had begun, she let a question pass without making a reply. The truth is, Mrs. Crayford was thinking.

She saw Clara's position plainly; she understood the disturbing effect of it on the mind of a young girl. Still, making all allowances, she felt quite at a loss, so far, to account for Clara's excessive agitation. Her quick observing faculty had just detected that Clara's face showed no signs of relief, now that she had unburdened herself of her secret. There was something clearly under the surface here—something of importance that still remained to be discovered. A shrewd doubt crossed Mrs. Crayford's mind, and inspired the next words which she addressed to her young friend.

“My dear,” she said abruptly, “have you told me all?”

Clara started as if the question terrified her. Feeling sure that she now had the clew in her hand, Mrs. Crayford deliberately repeated her question, in another form of words. Instead of answering, Clara suddenly looked up. At the same moment a faint flush of color appeared in her face for the first time.

Looking up instinctively on her side, Mrs. Crayford became aware of the presence, in the conservatory, of a young gentleman who was claiming Clara as his partner in the coming waltz. Mrs. Crayford fell into thinking once more. Had this young gentleman (she asked herself) anything to do with the untold end of the story? Was *this* the true secret of Clara Burnham’s terror at the impending return of Richard Wardour? Mrs. Crayford decided on putting her doubts to the test.

“A friend of yours, my dear?” she asked, innocently. “Suppose you introduce us to each other.”

Clara confusedly introduced the young gentleman.

“Mr. Francis Aldersley, Lucy. Mr. Aldersley belongs to the Arctic expedition.”

“Attached to the expedition?” Mrs. Crayford repeated. “I am attached to the expedition too—in my way. I had better introduce myself, Mr. Aldersley, as Clara seems to have forgotten to do it for me. I am Mrs. Crayford. My husband is Lieutenant Crayford, of the *Wanderer*. Do you belong to that ship?”

“I have not the honor, Mrs. Crayford. I belong to the *Sea-mew*.”

Mrs. Crayford's superb eyes looked shrewdly backward and forward between Clara and Francis Aldersley, and saw the untold sequel to Clara's story. The young officer was a bright, handsome, gentleman-like lad. Just the person to seriously complicate the difficulty with Richard Wardour! There was no time for making any further inquiries. The band had begun the prelude to the waltz, and Francis Aldersley was waiting for his partner. With a word of apology to the young man, Mrs. Crayford drew Clara aside for a moment, and spoke to her in a whisper.

“One word, my dear, before you return to the ball-room. It may sound conceited, after the little you have told me; but I think I understand your position *now*, better than you do yourself. Do you want to hear my opinion?”

“I am longing to hear it, Lucy! I want your opinion; I want your advice.”

“You shall have both in the plainest and fewest words. First, my opinion: You have no choice but to come to an explanation with Mr. Wardour as soon as he returns. Second, my advice: If you wish to make the explanation easy to both sides, take care that you make it in the character of a free woman.”

She laid a strong emphasis on the last three words, and looked pointedly at Francis Aldersley as she pronounced them. “I won't keep

you from your partner any longer, Clara," she resumed, and led the way back to the ball-room.

CHAPTER III.

THE burden on Clara's mind weighs on it more heavily than ever, after what Mrs. Crayford has said to her. She is too unhappy to feel the inspiring influence of the dance. After a turn round the room, she complains of fatigue. Mr. Francis Aldersley looks at the conservatory (still as invitingly cool and empty as ever); leads her back to it; and places her on a seat among the shrubs. She tries—very feebly—to dismiss him.

"Don't let me keep you from dancing, Mr. Aldersley."

He seats himself by her side, and feasts his eyes on the lovely downcast face that dares not turn toward him. He whispers to her:

"Call me Frank."

She longs to call him Frank—she loves him with all her heart. But Mrs. Crayford's warning words are still in her mind. She never opens her lips. Her lover moves a little closer, and asks another favor. Men are all alike on these occasions. Silence invariably encourages them to try again.

"Clara! have you forgotten what I said at the concert yesterday? May I say it again?"

"No!"

“We sail to-morrow for the Arctic seas. I may not return for years. Don’t send me away without hope! Think of the long, lonely time in the dark North! Make it a happy time for *me*.”

Though he speaks with the fervor of a man, he is little more than a lad: he is only twenty years old, and he is going to risk his young life on the frozen deep! Clara pities him as she never pitied any human creature before. He gently takes her hand. She tries to release it.

“What! not even that little favor on the last night?”

Her faithful heart takes his part, in spite of her. Her hand remains in his, and feels its soft persuasive pressure. She is a lost woman. It is only a question of time now!

“Clara! do you love me?”

There is a pause. She shrinks from looking at him—she trembles with strange contradictory sensations of pleasure and pain. His arm steals round her; he repeats his question in a whisper; his lips almost touch her little rosy ear as he says it again:

“Do you love me?”

She closes her eyes faintly—she hears nothing but those words—feels nothing but his arm round her—forgets Mrs. Crayford’s warning—forgets Richard Wardour himself—turns suddenly, with a loving woman’s desperate disregard of everything but her love—nestles her head on his bosom, and answers him in that way, at last!

He lifts the beautiful drooping head—their

lips meet in their first kiss—they are both in heaven: it is Clara who brings them back to earth again with a start—it is Clara who says, “Oh! what have I done?”—as usual, when it is too late.

Frank answers the question.

“You have made me happy, my angel. Now, when I come back, I come back to make you my wife.”

She shudders. She remembers Richard Wardour again at those words.

“Mind!” she says, “nobody is to know we are engaged till I permit you to mention it. Remember that!”

He promises to remember it. His arm tries to wind round her once more. No! She is mistress of herself; she can positively dismiss him now—after she has let him kiss her!

“Go!” she says. “I want to see Mrs. Crayford. Find her! Say I am here, waiting to speak to her. Go at once, Frank—for my sake!”

There is no alternative but to obey her. His eyes drink a last draught of her beauty. He hurries away on his errand—the happiest man in the room. Five minutes since she was only his partner in the dance. He has spoken—and she has pledged herself to be his partner for life!

CHAPTER IV.

It was not easy to find Mrs. Crayford in the crowd. Searching here, and searching there, Frank became conscious of a stranger, who appeared to be looking for somebody, on his side. He was a dark, heavy-browed, strongly-built man, dressed in a shabby old naval officer's uniform. His manner—strikingly resolute and self-contained—was unmistakably the manner of a gentleman. He wound his way slowly through the crowd; stopping to look at every lady whom he passed, and then looking away again with a frown. Little by little he approached the conservatory—entered it, after a moment's reflection—detected the glimmer of a white dress in the distance, through the shrubs and flowers—advanced to get a nearer view of the lady—and burst into Clara's presence with a cry of delight.

She sprang to her feet. She stood before him speechless, motionless, struck to stone. All her life was in her eyes—the eyes which told her she was looking at Richard Wardour.

He was the first to speak.

“I am sorry I startled you, my darling. I forgot everything but the happiness of seeing you again. We only reached our moorings two hours since. I was some time inquiring after you, and some time getting my ticket when they told me you were at the ball. Wish me joy, Clara! I am promoted. I have come back to make you my wife.”

A momentary change passed over the blank terror of her face. Her color rose faintly, her lips moved. She abruptly put a question to him.

“Did you get my letter?”

He started. “A letter from you? I never received it.”

The momentary animation died out of her face again. She drew back from him and dropped into a chair. He advanced toward her, astonished and alarmed. She shrank in the chair—shrank, as if she was frightened of him.

“Clara, you have not even shaken hands with me! What does it mean?”

He paused; waiting and watching her. She made no reply. A flash of the quick temper in him leaped up in his eyes. He repeated his last words in louder and sterner tones:

“What does it mean?”

She replied this time. His tone had hurt her—his tone had roused her sinking courage.

“It means, Mr. Wardour, that you have been mistaken from the first.”

“How have I been mistaken?”

“You have been under a wrong impression, and you have given me no opportunity of setting you right.”

“In what way have I been wrong?”

“You have been too hasty and too confident about yourself and about me. You have entirely misunderstood me. I am grieved to distress you, but for your sake I must speak plainly. I am your friend always, Mr. Wardour. I can never be your wife.”

He mechanically repeated the last words. He seemed to doubt whether he had heard her aright.

“You can never be my wife?”

“Never!”

“Why?”

There was no answer. She was incapable of telling him a falsehood. She was ashamed to tell him the truth.

He stooped over her, and suddenly possessed himself of her hand. Holding her hand firmly, he stooped a little lower; searching for the signs which might answer him in her face. His own face darkened slowly while he looked. He was beginning to suspect her; and he acknowledged it in his next words.

“Something has changed you toward me, Clara. Somebody has influenced you against me. Is it—you force me to ask the question—is it some other man?”

“You have no right to ask me that.”

He went on without noticing what she had said to him.

“Has that other man come between you and me? I speak plainly on my side. Speak plainly on yours.”

“I *have* spoken. I have nothing more to say.”

There was a pause. She saw the warning light which told of the fire within him, growing brighter and brighter in his eyes. She felt his grasp strengthening on her hand. He appealed to her for the last time.

“Reflect,” he said, “reflect before it is too late. Your silence will not serve you. If you

persist in not answering me, I shall take your silence as a confession. Do you hear me?"

"I hear you."

"Clara Burnham! I am not to be trifled with. Clara Burnham! I insist on the truth. Are you false to me?"

She resented that searching question with a woman's keen sense of the insult that is implied in doubting her to her face.

"Mr. Wardour! you forget yourself when you call me to account in that way. I never encouraged you. I never gave you promise or pledge—"

He passionately interrupted her before she could say more.

"You have engaged yourself in my absence. Your words own it; your looks own it! You have engaged yourself to another man!"

"If I *have* engaged myself, what right have you to complain of it?" she answered firmly. "What right have you to control my actions—?"

The next words died away on her lips. He suddenly dropped her hand. A marked change appeared in the expression of his eyes—a change which told her of the terrible passions that she had let loose in him. She read, dimly read, something in his face which made her tremble—not for herself, but for Frank.

Little by little the dark color faded out of his face. His deep voice dropped suddenly to a low and quiet tone as he spoke the parting words.

"Say no more, Miss Burnham—you have said enough. I am answered; I am dismissed." He

paused, and, stepping close up to her, laid his hand on her arm.

“The time may come,” he said, “when I shall forgive *you*. But the man who has robbed me of you shall rue the day when you and he first met.”

He turned and left her.

A few minutes later, Mrs. Crayford, entering the conservatory, was met by one of the attendants at the ball. The man stopped as if he wished to speak to her.

“What do you want?” she asked.

“I beg your pardon, ma’am. Do you happen to have a smelling-bottle about you? There is a young lady in the conservatory who is taken faint.”

CHAPTER V.

THE morning of the next day—the morning on which the ships were to sail—came bright and breezy. Mrs. Crayford, having arranged to follow her husband to the water-side, and see the last of him before he embarked, entered Clara’s room on her way out of the house, anxious to hear how her young friend passed the night. To her astonishment she found Clara had risen, and was dressed, like herself, to go out.

“What does this mean, my dear? After what you suffered last night—after the shock of seeing

that man—why don't you take my advice and rest in your bed?"

"I can't rest. I have not slept all night. Have you been out yet?"

"No."

"Have you seen or heard anything of Richard Wardour?"

"What an extraordinary question!"

"Answer my question! Don't trifle with me!"

"Compose yourself, Clara. I have neither seen nor heard anything of Richard Wardour. Take my word for it, he is far enough away by this time."

"No! He is here! He is near us! All night long the presentiment has pursued me—Frank and Richard Wardour will meet."

"My dear child! what are you thinking of? They are total strangers to each other."

"Something will happen to bring them together. I feel it! I know it! They will meet—there will be a mortal quarrel between them—and I shall be to blame. Oh, Lucy! why didn't I take your advice?—Why was I mad enough to let Frank know that I loved him? Are you going to the landing-stage? I am all ready—I must go with you."

"You must not think of it, Clara. There will be crowding and confusion at the water-side. You are not strong enough to bear it. Wait—I won't be long away—wait till I come back."

"I must and will go with you! Crowd? *He* will be among the crowd! Confusion? In that confusion *he* will find his way to Frank! Don't

ask me to wait. I shall go mad if I wait. I shall not know a moment's ease until I have seen Frank, with my own eyes, safe in the boat which takes him to his ship! You have got your bonnet on; what are we stopping here for? Come! or I shall go without you. Look at the clock; we have not a moment to lose!"

It was useless to contend with her. Mrs. Crayford yielded. The two women left the house together.

The landing-stage, as Mrs. Crayford had predicted, was thronged with spectators. Not only the relatives and friends of the Arctic voyagers, but strangers as well, had assembled in large numbers to see the ships sail. Clara's eyes wandered affrightedly hither and thither among the strange faces in the crowd; searching for the one face that she dreaded to see, and not finding it. So completely were her nerves unstrung, that she started with a cry of alarm on suddenly hearing Frank's voice behind her.

"The *Sea-mew's* boats are waiting," he said. "I must go, darling. How pale you are looking, Clara! Are you ill?"

She never answered. She questioned him with wild eyes and trembling lips.

"Has anything happened to you, Frank? anything out of the common?"

Frank laughed at the strange question.

"Anything out of the common?" he repeated. "Nothing that I know of, except sailing for the Arctic seas. That's out of the common, I suppose—isn't it?"

“Has anybody spoken to you since last night? Has any stranger followed you in the street?”

Frank turned in blank amazement to Mrs. Crayford.

“What on earth does she mean?”

Mrs. Crayford’s lively invention supplied her with an answer on the spur of the moment.

“Do you believe in dreams, Frank? Of course you don’t! Clara has been dreaming about you; and Clara is foolish enough to believe in dreams. That’s all—it’s not worth talking about. Hark! they are calling you. Say good-by, or you will be too late for the boat.”

Frank took Clara’s hand. Long afterward—in the dark Arctic days, in the dreary Arctic nights—he remembered how coldly and how passively that hand lay in his.

“Courage, Clara!” he said, gayly. “A sailor’s sweetheart must accustom herself to partings. The time will soon pass. Good-by, my darling! Good-by, my wife!”

He kissed the cold hand; he looked his last—for many a long year, perhaps!—at the pale and beautiful face. “How she loves me!” he thought. “How the parting distresses her!” He still held her hand; he would have lingered longer, if Mrs. Crayford had not wisely waived all ceremony and pushed him away.

The two ladies followed him at a safe distance through the crowd, and saw him step into the boat. The oars struck the water; Frank waved his cap to Clara. In a moment more a vessel at anchor hid the boat from view. They had

seen the last of him on his way to the Frozen Deep!

“No Richard Wardour in the boat,” said Mrs. Crayford. “No Richard Wardour on the shore. Let this be a lesson to you, my dear. Never be foolish enough to believe in presentiments again.”

Clara’s eyes still wandered suspiciously to and fro among the crowd.

“Are you not satisfied yet?” asked Mrs. Crayford.

“No,” Clara answered, “I am not satisfied yet.”

“What! still looking for him? This is really too absurd. Here is my husband coming. I shall tell him to call a cab, and send you home.”

Clara drew back a few steps.

“I won’t be in the way, Lucy, while you are taking leave of your good husband,” she said. “I will wait here.”

“Wait here! What for?”

“For something which I may yet see; or for something which I may still hear.”

“Richard Wardour?”

“Richard Wardour.”

Mrs. Crayford turned to her husband without another word. Clara’s infatuation was beyond the reach of remonstrance.

The boats of the *Wanderer* took the place at the landing-stage vacated by the boats of the *Sea-mew*. A burst of cheering among the outer ranks of the crowd announced the arrival of the commander of the expedition on the scene. Cap-

tain Holding appeared, looking right and left for his first lieutenant. Finding Crayford with his wife, the captain made his apologies for interfering, with his best grace.

“Give him up to his professional duties for one minute, Mrs. Crayford, and you shall have him back again for half an hour. The Arctic expedition is to blame, my dear lady—not the captain—for parting man and wife. In Crayford’s place, I should have left it to the bachelors to find the Northwest Passage, and have stopped at home with you!”

Excusing himself in those bluntly complimentary terms, Captain Holding drew the lieutenant aside a few steps, accidentally taking a direction that led the two officers close to the place at which Clara was standing. Both the captain and the lieutenant were too completely absorbed in their professional business to notice her. Neither the one nor the other had the faintest suspicion that she could and did hear every word of the talk that passed between them.

“You received my note this morning?” the captain began.

“Certainly, Captain Holding, or I should have been on board the ship before this.”

“I am going on board myself at once,” the captain proceeded, “but I must ask you to keep your boat waiting for half an hour more. You will be all the longer with your wife, you know. I thought of that, Crayford.”

“I am much obliged to you, Captain Holding. I suppose there is some other reason for inverting

the customary order of things, and keeping the lieutenant on shore after the captain is on board?"

"Quite true! there *is* another reason. I want you to wait for a volunteer who has just joined us."

"A volunteer!"

"Yes. He has his outfit to get in a hurry, and he may be half an hour late."

"It's rather a sudden appointment, isn't it?"

"No doubt. Very sudden."

"And—pardon me—it's rather a long time (as we are situated) to keep the ships waiting for one man?"

"Quite true, again. But a man who is worth having is worth waiting for. This man is worth having; this man is worth his weight in gold to such an expedition as ours. Seasoned to all climates and all fatigues—a strong fellow, a brave fellow, a clever fellow—in short, an excellent officer. I know him well, or I should never have taken him. The country gets plenty of work out of my new volunteer, Crayford. He only returned yesterday from foreign service."

"He only returned yesterday from foreign service! And he volunteers this morning to join the Arctic expedition? You astonish me."

"I dare say I do! You can't be more astonished than I was, when he presented himself at my hotel and told me what he wanted. 'Why, my good fellow, you have just got home,' I said. 'Are you weary of your freedom, after only a

few hours' experience of it?' His answer rather startled me. He said, 'I am weary of my life, sir. I have come home and found a trouble to welcome me, which goes near to break my heart. If I don't take refuge in absence and hard work, I am a lost man. Will you give me a refuge?' That's what he said, Crayford, word for word."

"Did you ask him to explain himself further?"

"Not I! I knew his value, and I took the poor devil on the spot, without pestering him with any more questions. No need to ask him to explain himself. The facts speak for themselves in these cases. The old story, my good friend! There's a woman at the bottom of it, of course."

Mrs. Crayford, waiting for the return of her husband as patiently as she could, was startled by feeling a hand suddenly laid on her shoulder. She looked round, and confronted Clara. Her first feeling of surprise changed instantly to alarm. Clara was trembling from head to foot.

"What is the matter? What has frightened you, my dear?"

"Lucy! I *have* heard of him!"

"Richard Wardour again?"

"Remember what I told you. I have heard every word of the conversation between Captain Holding and your husband. A man came to the captain this morning and volunteered to join the *Wanderer*. The captain has taken him. The man is Richard Wardour."

“You don’t mean it! Are you sure? Did you hear Captain Holding mention his name?”

“No.”

“Then how do you know it’s Richard Wardour?”

“Don’t ask me! I am as certain of it, as that I am standing here! They are going away together, Lucy—away to the eternal ice and snow. My foreboding has come true! The two will meet—the man who is to marry me and the man whose heart I have broken!”

“Your foreboding has *not* come true, Clara! The men have not met here—the men are not likely to meet elsewhere. They are appointed to separate ships. Frank belongs to the *Sea-mew*, and Wardour to the *Wanderer*. See! Captain Holding has done. My husband is coming this way. Let me make sure. Let me speak to him.”

Lieutenant Crayford returned to his wife. She spoke to him instantly.

“William! you have got a new volunteer who joins the *Wanderer*?”

“What! you have been listening to the captain and me?”

“I want to know his name?”

“How in the world did you manage to hear what we said to each other?”

“His name? has the captain given you his name?”

“Don’t excite yourself, my dear. Look! you are positively alarming Miss Burnham. The new volunteer is a perfect stranger to us. There is his name—last on the ship’s list.”

Mrs. Crayford snatched the list out of her husband's hand, and read the name: •

“RICHARD WARDOUR.”

SECOND SCENE.—THE HUT OF THE
“SEA-MEW.”

CHAPTER VI.

GOOD-BY to England! Good-by to inhabited and civilized regions of the earth!

Two years have passed since the voyagers sailed from their native shores. The enterprise has failed—the Arctic expedition is lost and ice-locked in the Polar wastes. The good ships *Wanderer* and *Sea-mew*, entombed in ice, will never ride the buoyant waters more. Stripped of their lighter timbers, both vessels have been used for the construction of huts, erected on the nearest land.

The largest of the two buildings which now shelter the lost men is occupied by the surviving officers and crew of the *Sea-mew*. On one side of the principal room are the sleeping berths and the fire-place. The other side discloses a broad door-way (closed by a canvas screen), which serves as a means of communication with an inner apartment, devoted to the superior officers. A hammock is slung to the rough raftered roof

of the main room, as an extra bed. A man, completely hidden by his bedclothes, is sleeping in the hammock. By the fireside there is a second man—supposed to be on the watch—fast asleep, poor wretch! at the present moment. Behind the sleeper stands an old cask, which serves for a table. The objects at present on the table are, a pestle and mortar, and a saucepanful of the dry bones of animals—in plain words, the dinner for the day. By way of ornament to the dull brown walls, icicles appear in the crevices of the timber, gleaming at intervals in the red fire-light. No wind whistles outside the lonely dwelling—no cry of bird or beast is heard. Indoors, and out-of-doors, the awful silence of the Polar desert reigns, for the moment, undisturbed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE first sound that broke the silence came from the inner apartment. An officer lifted the canvas screen in the hut of the *Sea-mew*, and entered the main room. Cold and privation had sadly thinned the ranks. The commander of the ship—Captain Ebsworth—was dangerously ill. The first lieutenant was dead. An officer of the *Wanderer* filled their places for the time, with Captain Holding's permission. The officer so employed was—Lieutenant Crayford.

He approached the man at the fireside, and awakened him.

“Jump up, Bateson! It’s your turn to be relieved.”

The relief appeared, rising from a heap of old sails at the back of the hut. Bateson vanished, yawning, to his bed. Lieutenant Crayford walked backward and forward briskly, trying what exercise would do toward warming his blood.

The pestle and mortar on the cask attracted his attention. He stopped and looked up at the man in the hammock.

“I must rouse the cook,” he said to himself, with a smile. “That fellow little thinks how useful he is in keeping up my spirits. The most inveterate croaker and grumbler in the world—and yet, according to his own account, the only cheerful man in the whole ship’s company. John Want! John Want! Rouse up, there!”

A head rose slowly out of the bedclothes, covered with a red night-cap. A melancholy nose rested itself on the edge of the hammock. A voice, worthy of the nose, expressed its opinion of the Arctic climate, in these words:

“Lord! Lord! here’s all my breath on my blanket. Icicles, if you please, sir, all round my mouth and all over my blanket. Every time I have snored, I’ve frozen something. When a man gets the cold into him to that extent that he ices his own bed, it can’t last much longer. Never mind! *I don’t grumble.*”

Crayford tapped the saucepan of bones impatiently. John Want lowered himself to the floor—grumbling all the way—by a rope attached to

the rafters at his bed head. Instead of approaching his superior officer and his saucepan, he hobbled, shivering, to the fire-place, and held his chin as close as he possibly could over the fire. Crayford looked after him.

“Halloo! what are you doing there?”

“Thawing my beard, sir.”

“Come here directly, and set to work on these bones.”

John Want remained immovably attached to the fire-place, holding something else over the fire. Crayford began to lose his temper.

“What the devil are you about now?”

“Thawing my watch, sir. It’s been under my pillow all night, and the cold has stopped it. Cheerful, wholesome, bracing sort of climate to live in; isn’t it, sir? Never mind! *I* don’t grumble.”

“No, we all know that. Look here! Are these bones pounded small enough?”

John Want suddenly approached the lieutenant, and looked at him with an appearance of the deepest interest.

“You’ll excuse me, sir,” he said; “how very hollow your voice sounds this morning!”

“Never mind my voice. The bones! the bones!”

“Yes, sir—the bones. They’ll take a trifle more pounding. I’ll do my best with them, sir, for your sake.”

“What do you mean?”

John Want shook his head, and looked at Crayford with a dreary smile.

“I don’t think I shall have the honor of making much more bone soup for you, sir. Do you think yourself you’ll last long, sir? I don’t, saving your presence. I think about another week or ten days will do for us all. Never mind! I don’t grumble.”

He poured the bones into the mortar, and began to pound them—under protest. At the same moment a sailor appeared, entering from the inner hut.

“A message from Captain Ebsworth, sir.”

“Well?”

“The captain is worse than ever with his freezing pains, sir. He wants to see you immediately.”

“I will go at once. Rouse the doctor.”

Answering in those terms, Crayford returned to the inner hut, followed by the sailor. John Want shook his head again, and smiled more drearily than ever.

“Rouse the doctor?” he repeated. “Suppose the doctor should be frozen? He hadn’t a ha’porth of warmth in him last night, and his voice sounded like a whisper in a speaking-trumpet. Will the bones do now? Yes, the bones will do now. Into the saucepan with you,” cried John Want, suiting the action to the word, “and flavor the hot water if you can! When I remember that I was once an apprentice at a pastry-cook’s—when I think of the gallons of turtle-soup that this hand has stirred up in a jolly hot kitchen—and when I find myself mixing bones and hot water for soup, and turning into ice as

fast as I can; if I wasn't of a cheerful disposition I should feel inclined to grumble. John Want! John Want! whatever had you done with your natural senses when you made up your mind to go to sea?"

A new voice hailed the cook, speaking from one of the bed-places in the side of the hut. It was the voice of Francis Aldersley.

"Who's that croaking over the fire?"

"Croaking?" repeated John Want, with the air of a man who considered himself the object of a gratuitous insult. "Croaking? You don't find your own voice at all altered for the worse—do you, Mr. Frank? I don't give *him*," John proceeded, speaking confidentially to himself, "more than six hours to last. He's one of your grumblers."

"What are you doing there?" asked Frank.

"I'm making bone soup, sir, and wondering why I ever went to sea."

"Well, and why did you go to sea?"

"I'm not certain, Mr. Frank. Sometimes I think it was natural perversity; sometimes I think it was false pride at getting over sea-sickness; sometimes I think it was reading 'Robinson Crusoe,' and books warning of me *not* to go to sea."

Frank laughed. "You're an odd fellow. What do you mean by false pride at getting over sea-sickness? Did you get over sea-sickness in some new way?"

[John Want's dismal face brightened in spite of himself. Frank had recalled to the cook's

memory one of the noteworthy passages in the cook's life.]

“That's it, sir!” he said. “If ever a man cured sea-sickness in a new way yet, I am that man—I got over it, Mr. Frank, by dint of hard eating. I was a passenger on board a packet-boat, sir, when first I saw blue water. A nasty lopp of a sea came on at dinner-time, and I began to feel queer the moment the soup was put on the table. ‘Sick?’ says the captain. ‘Rather, sir,’ says I. ‘Will you try my cure?’ says the captain. ‘Certainly, sir,’ says I. ‘Is your heart in your mouth yet?’ says the captain. ‘Not quite, sir,’ says I. ‘Mock-turtle soup?’ says the captain, and helps me. I swallow a couple of spoonfuls, and turn as white as a sheet. The captain cocks his eye at me. ‘Go on deck, sir,’ says he; ‘get rid of the soup, and then come back to the cabin.’ I got rid of the soup, and came back to the cabin. ‘Cod's head-and-shoulders,’ says the captain, and helps me. ‘I can't stand it, sir,’ says I. ‘You must,’ says the captain, ‘because it's the cure.’ I crammed down a mouthful, and turned paler than ever. ‘Go on deck,’ says the captain. ‘Get rid of the cod's head, and come back to the cabin.’ Off I go, and back I come. ‘Boiled leg of mutton and trimmings,’ says the captain, and helps me. ‘No fat, sir,’ says I. ‘Fat's the cure,’ says the captain, and makes me eat it. ‘Lean's the cure,’ says the captain, and makes me eat it. ‘Steady?’ says the captain. ‘Sick,’ says I. ‘Go on deck,’ says the captain; ‘get rid of the boiled leg of

mutton and trimmings and come back to the cabin.' Off I go, staggering—back I come, more dead than alive. 'Deviled kidneys,' says the captain. I shut my eyes, and got 'em down. 'Cure's beginning,' says the captain. 'Mutton-chop and pickles.' I shut my eyes, and got *them* down. 'Broiled ham and cayenne pepper,' says the captain. 'Glass of stout and cranberry tart. Want to go on deck again?' 'No, sir,' says I. 'Cure's done,' says the captain. 'Never you give in to your stomach, and your stomach will end in giving in to *you*.' "

Having stated the moral purpose of his story in those unanswerable words, John Want took himself and his saucepan into the kitchen. A moment later, Crayford returned to the hut and astonished Frank Aldersley by an unexpected question.

"Have you anything in your berth, Frank, that you set a value on?"

Frank looked puzzled.

"Nothing that I set the smallest value on—when I am out of it," he replied. "What does your question mean?"

"We are almost as short of fuel as we are of provisions," Crayford proceeded. "Your berth will make good firing. I have directed Bateson to be here in ten minutes with his ax."

"Very attentive and considerate on your part," said Frank. "What is to become of me, if you please, when Bateson has chopped my bed into fire-wood?"

"Can't you guess?"

“I suppose the cold has stupefied me. The riddle is beyond my reading. Suppose you give me a hint?”

“Certainly. There will be beds to spare soon—there is to be a change at last in our wretched lives here. Do you see it now?”

Frank’s eyes sparkled. He sprang out of his berth, and waved his fur cap in triumph.

“See it?” he exclaimed; “of course I do! The exploring party is to start at last. Do I go with the expedition?”

“It is not very long since you were in the doctor’s hands, Frank,” said Crayford, kindly. “I doubt if you are strong enough yet to make one of the exploring party.”

“Strong enough or not,” returned Frank, “any risk is better than pining and perishing here. Put me down, Crayford, among those who volunteer to go.”

“Volunteers will not be accepted, in this case,” said Crayford. “Captain Holding and Captain Ebsworth see serious objections, as we are situated, to that method of proceeding.”

“Do they mean to keep the appointments in their own hands?” asked Frank. “I for one object to that.”

“Wait a little,” said Crayford. “You were playing backgammon the other day with one of the officers. Does the board belong to him or to you?”

“It belongs to me. I have got it in my locker here. What do you want with it?”

“I want the dice and the box for casting lots.

The captains have arranged—most wisely, as I think—that Chance shall decide among us who goes with the expedition and who stays behind in the huts. The officers and crew of the *Wanderer* will be here in a few minutes to cast the lots. Neither you nor any one can object to that way of deciding among us. Officers and men alike take their chance together. Nobody can grumble.”

“I am quite satisfied,” said Frank. “But I know of one man among the officers who is sure to make objections.”

“Who is the man?”

“You know him well enough, too. The ‘Bear of the Expedition,’ Richard Wardour.”

“Frank! Frank! you have a bad habit of letting your tongue run away with you. Don’t repeat that stupid nickname when you talk of my good friend, Richard Wardour.”

“Your good friend? Crayford! your liking for that man amazes me.”

Crayford laid his hand kindly on Frank’s shoulder. Of all the officers of the *Sea-mew*, Crayford’s favorite was Frank.

“Why should it amaze you?” he asked. “What opportunities have *you* had of judging? You and Wardour have always belonged to different ships. I have never seen you in Wardour’s society for five minutes together. How can *you* form a fair estimate of his character?”

“I take the general estimate of his character,” Frank answered. “He has got his nickname because he is the most unpopular man in his ship.

Nobody likes him—there must be some reason for that.”

“There is only one reason for it,” Crayford rejoined. “Nobody understands Richard Wardour. I am not talking at random. Remember, I sailed from England with him in the *Wanderer*; and I was only transferred to the *Sea-mew* long after we were locked up in the ice. I was Richard Wardour’s companion on board ship for months, and I learned there to do him justice. Under all his outward defects, I tell you, there beats a great and generous heart. Suspend your opinion, my lad, until you know my friend as well as I do. No more of this now. Give me the dice and the box.”

Frank opened his locker. At the same moment the silence of the snowy waste outside was broken by a shouting of voices hailing the hut—“*Sea-mew*, ahoy!”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE sailor on watch opened the outer door. There, plodding over the ghastly white snow, were the officers of the *Wanderer* approaching the hut. There, scattered under the merciless black sky, were the crew, with the dogs and the sledges, waiting the word which was to start them on their perilous and doubtful journey.

Captain Holding of the *Wanderer*, accompanied by his officers, entered the hut, in high spirits at the prospect of a change. Behind

them, lounging in slowly by himself, was a dark, sullen, heavy-browed man. He neither spoke, nor offered his hand to anybody: he was the one person present who seemed to be perfectly indifferent to the fate in store for him. This was the man whom his brother officers had nicknamed the Bear of the Expedition. In other words—Richard Wardour.

Crayford advanced to welcome Captain Holding. Frank, remembering the friendly reproof which he had just received, passed over the other officers of the *Wanderer*, and made a special effort to be civil to Crayford's friend.

“Good-morning, Mr. Wardour,” he said. “We may congratulate each other on the chance of leaving this horrible place.”

“*You* may think it horrible,” Wardour retorted; “I like it.”

“Like it? Good Heavens! why?”

“Because there are no women here.”

Frank turned to his brother officers, without making any further advances in the direction of Richard Wardour. The Bear of the Expedition was more unapproachable than ever.

In the meantime the hut had become thronged by the able-bodied officers and men of the two ships. Captain Holding, standing in the midst of them, with Crayford by his side, proceeded to explain the purpose of the contemplated expedition to the audience which surrounded him.

He began in these words:

“Brother officers and men of the *Wanderer* and *Sea-mew*, it is my duty to tell you, very

briefly, the reasons which have decided Captain Ebsworth and myself on dispatching an exploring party in search of help. Without recalling all the hardships we have suffered for the last two years—the destruction, first of one of our ships, then of the other; the death of some of our bravest and best companions; the vain battles we have been fighting with the ice and snow, and boundless desolation of these inhospitable regions—without dwelling on these things, it is my duty to remind you that this, the last place in which we have taken refuge, is far beyond the track of any previous expedition, and that consequently our chance of being discovered by any rescuing parties that may be sent to look after us is, to say the least of it, a chance of the most uncertain kind. You all agree with me, gentlemen, so far?”

The officers (with the exception of Wardour, who stood apart in sullen silence) all agreed, so far.

The captain went on.

“It is therefore urgently necessary that we should make another, and probably a last, effort to extricate ourselves. The winter is not far off, game is getting scarcer and scarcer, our stock of provisions is running low, and the sick—especially, I am sorry to say, the sick in the *Wanderer's* hut—are increasing in number day by day. We must look to our own lives, and to the lives of those who are dependent on us; and we have no time to lose.”

The officers echoed the words cheerfully.

“Right! right! No time to lose.”

Captain Holding resumed:

“The plan proposed is, that a detachment of the able-bodied officers and men among us should set forth this very day, and make another effort to reach the nearest inhabited settlements, from which help and provisions may be dispatched to those who remain here. The new direction to be taken, and the various precautions to be adopted, are all drawn out ready. The only question now before us is, Who is to stop here, and who is to undertake the journey?”

The officers answered the question with one accord—“Volunteers!”

The men echoed their officers. “Ay, ay, volunteers.”

Wardour still preserved his sullen silence. Crayford noticed him, standing apart from the rest, and appealed to him personally.

“Do you say nothing?” he asked.

“Nothing,” Wardour answered. “Go or stay, it’s all one to me.”

“I hope you don’t really mean that?” said Crayford.

“I do.”

“I am sorry to hear it, Wardour.”

Captain Holding answered the general suggestion in favor of volunteering by a question which instantly checked the rising enthusiasm of the meeting.

“Well,” he said, “suppose we say volunteers. Who volunteers to stop in the huts?”

There was a dead silence. The officers and

men looked at each other confusedly. The captain continued:

“You see we can’t settle it by volunteering. You all want to go. Every man among us who has the use of his limbs naturally wants to go. But what is to become of these who have *not* got the use of their limbs? Some of us must stay here, and take care of the sick.”

Everybody admitted that this was true.

“So we get back again,” said the captain, “to the old question—Who among the able-bodied is to go? and who is to stay? Captain Ebsworth says, and I say, let chance decide it. Here are dice. The numbers run as high as twelve—double sixes. All who throw under six, stay; all who throw over six, go. Officers of the *Wanderer* and the *Sea-mew*, do you agree to that way of meeting the difficulty?”

All the officers agreed, with the one exception of Wardour, who still kept silence.

“Men of the *Wanderer* and *Sea-mew*, your officers agree to cast lots. Do you agree too?”

The men agreed without a dissentient voice. Crayford handed the box and the dice to Captain Holding.

“You throw first, sir. Under six, ‘Stay.’ Over six, ‘Go.’”

Captain Holding cast the dice; the top of the cask serving for a table. He threw seven.

“Go,” said Crayford. “I congratulate you, sir. Now for my own chance.” He cast the dice in his turn. Three! “Stay! Ah, well! well! if I can do my duty, and be of use to

others, what does it matter whether I go or stay? Wardour, you are next, in the absence of your first lieutenant."

Wardour prepared to cast, without shaking the dice.

"Shake the box, man!" cried Crayford. "Give yourself a chance of luck!"

Wardour persisted in letting the dice fall out carelessly, just as they lay in the box.

"Not I!" he muttered to himself. "I've done with luck." Saying those words, he threw down the empty box, and seated himself on the nearest chest, without looking to see how the dice had fallen.

Crayford examined them. "Six!" he exclaimed. "There! you have a second chance, in spite of yourself. You are neither under nor over—you throw again."

"Bah!" growled the Bear. "It's not worth the trouble of getting up for. Somebody else throw for me." He suddenly looked at Frank. "You! you have got what the women call a lucky face."

Frank appealed to Crayford. "Shall I?"

"Yes, if he wishes it," said Crayford.

Frank cast the dice. "Two! He stays! Wardour, I am sorry I have thrown against you."

"Go or stay," reiterated Wardour, "it's all one to me. You will be luckier, young one, when you cast for yourself."

Frank cast for himself.

"Eight. Hurra! I go!"

“What did I tell you?” said Wardour. “The chance was yours. You have thriven on my ill luck.”

He rose, as he spoke, to leave the hut. Crayford stopped him.

“Have you anything particular to do, Richard?”

“What has anybody to do here?”

“Wait a little, then. I want to speak to you when this business is over.”

“Are you going to give me any more good advice?”

“Don’t look at me in that sour way, Richard. I am going to ask you a question about something which concerns yourself.”

Wardour yielded without a word more. He returned to his chest, and cynically composed himself to slumber. The casting of the lots went on rapidly among the officers and men. In another half-hour chance had decided the question of “Go” or “Stay” for all alike. The men left the hut. The officers entered the inner apartment for a last conference with the bed-ridden captain of the *Sea-mew*. Wardour and Crayford were left together, alone.

CHAPTER IX.

CRAYFORD touched his friend on the shoulder to rouse him. Wardour looked up, impatiently, with a frown.

“I was just asleep,” he said. “Why do you wake me?”

“Look round you, Richard. We are alone.”

“Well—and what of that?”

“I wish to speak to you privately; and this is my opportunity. You have disappointed and surprised me to-day. Why did you say it was all one to you whether you went or stayed? Why are you the only man among us who seems to be perfectly indifferent whether we are rescued or not?”

“Can a man always give a reason for what is strange in his manner or his words?” Wardour retorted.

“He can try,” said Crayford, quietly—“when his friend asks him.”

Wardour’s manner softened.

“That’s true,” he said. “I *will* try. Do you remember the first night at sea when we sailed from England in the *Wanderer*?”

“As well as if it was yesterday.”

“A calm, still night,” the other went on, thoughtfully. “No clouds, no stars. Nothing in the sky but the broad moon, and hardly a ripple to break the path of light she made in the quiet water. Mine was the middle watch that night. You came on deck, and found me alone—”

He stopped. Crayford took his hand, and finished the sentence for him.

“Alone—and in tears.”

“The last I shall ever shed,” Wardour added, bitterly.

“Don’t say that! There are times when a man is to be pitied indeed, if he can shed no tears. Go on, Richard.”

Wardour proceeded—still following the old recollections, still preserving his gentler tones.

“I should have quarreled with any other man who had surprised me at that moment,” he said. “There was something, I suppose, in your voice when you asked my pardon for disturbing me, that softened my heart. I told you I had met with a disappointment which had broken me for life. There was no need to explain further. The only hopeless wretchedness in this world is the wretchedness that women cause.”

“And the only unalloyed happiness,” said Crayford, “the happiness that women bring.”

“That may be your experience of them,” Wardour answered; “mine is different. All the devotion, the patience, the humility, the worship that there is in man, I laid at the feet of a woman. She accepted the offering as women do—accepted it, easily, gracefully, unfeelingly—accepted it as a matter of course. I left England to win a high place in my profession, before I dared to win *her*. I braved danger, and faced death. I staked my life in the fever swamps of Africa, to gain the promotion that I only desired for her sake—and gained it. I came back to give her all, and to ask nothing in return, but to rest my weary heart in the sunshine of her smile. And her own lips—the lips I had kissed at parting—told me that another man had robbed me of her. I spoke but few words when I heard that

confession, and left her forever. 'The time may come,' I told her, 'when I shall forgive *you*. But the man who has robbed me of you shall rue the day when you and he first met.' Don't ask me who he was! I have yet to discover him. The treachery had been kept secret; nobody could tell me where to find him; nobody could tell me who he was. What did it matter? When I had lived out the first agony, I could rely on myself—I could be patient, and bide my time."

"Your time? What time?"

"The time when I and that man shall meet face to face. I knew it then; I know it now—it was written on my heart then, it is written on my heart now—we two shall meet and know each other! With that conviction strong within me, I volunteered for this service, as I would have volunteered for anything that set work and hardship and danger, like ramparts, between my misery and me. With that conviction strong within me still, I tell you it is no matter whether I stay here with the sick, or go hence with the strong. I shall live till I have met that man! There is a day of reckoning appointed between us. Here in the freezing cold, or away in the deadly heat; in battle or in shipwreck; in the face of starvation; under the shadow of pestilence—I, though hundreds are falling round me, I shall live! live for the coming of one day! live for the meeting with one man!"

He stopped, trembling, body and soul, under the hold that his own terrible superstition had fastened on him. Crayford drew back in silent

horror. Wardour noticed the action—he resented it—he appealed, in defense of his one cherished conviction, to Crayford’s own experience of him.

“Look at me!” he cried. “Look how I have lived and thriven, with the heart-ache gnawing at me at home, and the winds of the icy north whistling round me here! I am the strongest man among you. Why? I have fought through hardships that have laid the best-seasoned men of all our party on their backs. Why? What have *I* done, that my life should throb as bravely through every vein in my body at this minute, and in this deadly place, as ever it did in the wholesome breezes of home? What am I preserved for? I tell you again, for the coming of one day—for the meeting with one man.”

He paused once more. This time Crayford spoke.

“Richard!” he said, “since we first met, I have believed in your better nature, against all outward appearance. I have believed in you, firmly, truly, as your brother might. You are putting that belief to a hard test. If your enemy had told me that you had ever talked as you talk now, that you had ever looked as you look now, I would have turned my back on him as the utterer of a vile calumny against a just, a brave, an upright man. Oh! my friend, my friend, if ever I have deserved well of you, put away these thoughts from your heart! Face me again, with the stainless look of a man who has trampled under his feet the bloody superstitions of

revenge, and knows them no more! Never, never, let the time come when I cannot offer you my hand as I offer it now, to the man I can still admire—to the brother I can still love!”

The heart that no other voice could touch felt that appeal. The fierce eyes, the hard voice, softened under Crayford’s influence. Richard Wardour’s head sank on his breast.

“You are kinder to me than I deserve,” he said. “Be kinder still, and forget what I have been talking about. No! no more about me; I am not worth it. We’ll change the subject, and never go back to it again. Let’s do something. Work, Crayford—that’s the true elixir of *our* life! Work, that stretches the muscles and sets the blood a-glowing. Work, that tires the body and rests the mind. Is there nothing in hand that I can do? Nothing to cut? nothing to carry?”

The door opened as he put the question. Bateson—appointed to chop Frank’s bed-place into firing—appeared punctually with his ax. Wardour, without a word of warning, snatched the ax out of the man’s hand.

“What was this wanted for?” he asked.

“To cut up Mr. Aldersley’s berth there into firing, sir.”

“I’ll do it for you! I’ll have it down in no time!” He turned to Crayford. “You needn’t be afraid about me, old friend. I am going to do the right thing. I am going to tire my body and rest my mind.”

The evil spirit in him was plainly subdued—

for the time, at least. Crayford took his hand in silence; and then (followed by Bateson) left him to his work.

CHAPTER X.

AX in hand, Wardour approached Frank's bed-place.

"If I could only cut the thoughts out of me," he said to himself, "as I am going to cut the billets out of this wood!" He attacked the bed-place with the ax, like a man who well knew the use of his instrument. "Oh me!" he thought, sadly, "if I had only been born a carpenter instead of a gentleman! A good ax, Master Bateson—I wonder where you got it? Something like a grip, my man, on this handle. Poor Crayford! his words stick in my throat. A fine fellow! a noble fellow! No use thinking, no use regretting; what is said, is said. Work! work! work!"

Plank after plank fell out on the floor. He laughed over the easy task of destruction. "Aha! young Aldersley! It doesn't take much to demolish your bed-place. I'll have it down! I would have the whole hut down, if they would only give me the chance of chopping at it!"

A long strip of wood fell to his ax—long enough to require cutting in two. He turned it, and stooped over it. Something caught his eye—letters carved in the wood. He looked

closer. The letters were very faintly and badly cut. He could only make out the first three of them; and even of those he was not quite certain. They looked like C L A—if they looked like anything. He threw down the strip of wood irritably.

“D—n the fellow (whoever he is) who cut this! Why should he carve *that* name, of all the names in the world?”

He paused, considering—then determined to go on again with his self-imposed labor. He was ashamed of his own outburst. He looked eagerly for the ax. “Work, work! Nothing for it but work.” He found the ax, and went on again.

He cut out another plank.

He stopped, and looked at it suspiciously.

There was carving again, on this plank. The letters F. and A. appeared on it.

He put down the ax. There were vague misgivings in him which he was not able to realize. The state of his own mind was fast becoming a puzzle to him.

“More carving,” he said to himself. “That’s the way these young idlers employ their long hours. F. A.? Those must be *his* initials—Frank Aldersley. Who carved the letters on the other plank? Frank Aldersley, too?”

He turned the piece of wood in his hand nearer to the light, and looked lower down it. More carving again, lower down! Under the initials F. A. were two more letters—C. B.

“C. B.?” he repeated to himself. “His sweet-

heart's initials, I suppose? Of course—at his age—his sweetheart's initials.”

He paused once more. A spasm of inner pain showed the shadow of its mysterious passage, outwardly on his face.

“*Her* cipher is C. B.,” he said, in low, broken tones. “C. B.—Clara Burnham.”

He waited, with the plank in his hand; repeating the name over and over again, as if it was a question he was putting to himself.

“Clara Burnham? Clara Burnham?”

He dropped the plank, and turned deadly pale in a moment. His eyes wandered furtively backward and forward between the strip of wood on the floor and the half-demolished berth. “Oh, God! what has come to me now?” he said to himself, in a whisper. He snatched up the ax, with a strange cry—something between rage and terror. He tried—fiercely, desperately tried—to go on with his work. No! strong as he was, he could not use the ax. His hands were helpless; they trembled incessantly. He went to the fire; he held his hands over it. They still trembled incessantly; they infected the rest of him. He shuddered all over. He knew fear. His own thoughts terrified him.

“Crayford!” he cried out. “Crayford! come here, and let's go hunting.”

No friendly voice answered him. No friendly face showed itself at the door.

An interval passed; and there came over him another change. He recovered his self-possession almost as suddenly as he had lost it. A smile

—a horrid, deforming, unnatural smile—spread slowly, stealthily, devilishly over his face. He left the fire; he put the ax away softly in a corner; he sat down in his old place, deliberately self-abandoned to a frenzy of vindictive joy. He had found the man! There, at the end of the world—there, at the last fight of the Arctic voyagers against starvation and death, he had found the man!

The minutes passed.

He became conscious, on a sudden, of a freezing stream of air pouring into the room.

He turned, and saw Crayford opening the door of the hut. A man was behind him. Wardour rose eagerly, and looked over Crayford's shoulder.

Was it—could it be—the man who had carved the letters on the plank? Yes! Frank Aldersley!

CHAPTER XI.

“STILL at work!” Crayford exclaimed, looking at the half-demolished bed-place. “Give yourself a little rest, Richard. The exploring party is ready to start. If you wish to take leave of your brother officers before they go, you have no time to lose.”

He checked himself there, looking Wardour full in the face.

“Good Heavens!” he cried, “how pale you are! Has anything happened?”

Frank—searching in his locker for articles of clothing which he might require on the journey—looked round. He was startled, as Crayford had been startled, by the sudden change in Wardour since they had last seen him.

“Are you ill?” he asked. “I hear you have been doing Bateson’s work for him. Have you hurt yourself?”

Wardour suddenly moved his head, so as to hide his face from both Crayford and Frank. He took out his handkerchief, and wound it clumsily round his left hand.

“Yes,” he said; “I hurt myself with the ax. It’s nothing. Never mind. Pain always has a curious effect on me. I tell you it’s nothing! Don’t notice it!”

He turned his face toward them again as suddenly as he had turned it away. He advanced a few steps, and addressed himself with an uneasy familiarity to Frank.

“I didn’t answer you civilly when you spoke to me some little time since. I mean when I first came in here along with the rest of them. I apologize. Shake hands! How are you? Ready for the march?”

Frank met the oddly abrupt advance which had been made to him with perfect good humor.

“I am glad to be friends with you, Mr. Wardour. I wish I was as well seasoned to fatigue as you are.”

Wardour burst into a hard, joyless, unnatural laugh.

“Not strong, eh? You don’t look it. The

dice had better have sent me away, and kept you here. I never felt in better condition in my life." He paused and added, with his eye on Frank and with a strong emphasis on the words: "We men of Kent are made of tough material."

Frank advanced a step on his side, with a new interest in Richard Wardour.

"You come from Kent?" he said.

"Yes. From East Kent." He waited a little once more, and looked hard at Frank. "Do you know that part of the country?" he asked.

"I ought to know something about East Kent," Frank answered. "Some dear friends of mine once lived there."

"Friends of yours?" Wardour repeated. "One of the county families, I suppose?"

As he put the question, he abruptly looked over his shoulder. He was standing between Crayford and Frank. Crayford, taking no part in the conversation, had been watching him, and listening to him more and more attentively as that conversation went on. Within the last moment or two Wardour had become instinctively conscious of this. He resented Crayford's conduct with needless irritability.

"Why are you staring at me?" he asked.

"Why are you looking unlike yourself?" Crayford answered, quietly.

Wardour made no reply. He renewed the conversation with Frank.

"One of the county families?" he resumed.

"The Winterbys of Yew Grange, I dare say?"

“No,” said Frank; “but friends of the Witherbys, very likely. The Burnhams.”

Desperately as he struggled to maintain it, Wardour’s self-control failed him. He started violently. The clumsily-wound handkerchief fell off his hand. Still looking at him attentively, Crayford picked it up.

“There is your handkerchief, Richard,” he said. “Strange!”

“What is strange?”

“You told us you had hurt yourself with the ax—”

“Well?”

“There is no blood on your handkerchief.”

Wardour snatched the handkerchief out of Crayford’s hand, and, turning away, approached the outer door of the hut. “No blood on the handkerchief,” he said to himself. “There may be a stain or two when Crayford sees it again.” He stopped within a few paces of the door, and spoke to Crayford. “You recommended me to take leave of my brother officers before it was too late,” he said. “I am going to follow your advice.”

The door was opened from the outer side as he laid his hand on the lock.

One of the quartermasters of the *Wanderer* entered the hut.

“Is Captain Holding here, sir?” he asked, addressing himself to Wardour.

Wardour pointed to Crayford.

“The lieutenant will tell you,” he said.

Crayford advanced and questioned the quar-

termaster. "What do you want with Captain Holding?" he asked.

"I have a report to make, sir. There has been an accident on the ice."

"To one of your men?"

"No, sir. To one of our officers."

Wardour, on the point of going out, paused when the quartermaster made that reply. For a moment he considered with himself. Then he walked slowly back to the part of the room in which Frank was standing. Crayford, directing the quartermaster, pointed to the arched doorway in the side of the hut.

"I am sorry to hear of the accident," he said. "You will find Captain Holding in that room."

For the second time, with singular persistency, Wardour renewed the conversation with Frank.

"So you knew the Burnhams?" he said.

"What became of Clara when her father died?"

Frank's face flushed angrily on the instant.

"Clara!" he repeated. "What authorizes you to speak of Miss Burnham in that familiar manner?"

Wardour seized the opportunity of quarreling with him.

"What right have you to ask?" he retorted, coarsely.

Frank's blood was up. He forgot his promise to Clara to keep their engagement secret—he forgot everything but the unbridled insolence of Wardour's language and manner.

"A right which I insist on your respecting,"

he answered. "The right of being engaged to marry her."

Crayford's steady eyes were still on the watch, and Wardour felt them on him. A little more and Crayford might openly interfere. Even Wardour recognized for once the necessity of controlling his temper, cost him what it might. He made his apologies, with overstrained politeness, to Frank.

"Impossible to dispute such a right as yours," he said. "Perhaps you will excuse me when you know that I am one of Miss Burnham's old friends. My father and her father were neighbors. We have always met like brother and sister—"

Frank generously stopped the apology there.

"Say no more," he interposed. "I was in the wrong—I lost my temper. Pray forgive me."

Wardour looked at him with a strange, reluctant interest while he was speaking. Wardour asked an extraordinary question when he had done.

"Is she very fond of you?"

Frank burst out laughing.

"My dear fellow," he said, "come to our wedding, and judge for yourself."

"Come to your wedding?" As he repeated the words Wardour stole one glance at Frank, which Frank (employed in buckling his knapsack) failed to see. Crayford noticed it, and Crayford's blood ran cold. Comparing the words which Wardour had spoken to him while they were alone together with the words that had just

passed in his presence, he could draw but one conclusion. The woman whom Wardour had loved and lost was—Clara Burnham. The man who had robbed him of her was Frank Aldersley. And Wardour had discovered it in the interval since they had last met. “Thank God!” thought Crayford, “the dice have parted them! Frank goes with the expedition, and Wardour stays behind with me.”

The reflection had barely occurred to him—Frank’s thoughtless invitation to Wardour had just passed his lips—when the canvas screen over the doorway was drawn aside. Captain Holding and the officers who were to leave with the exploring party returned to the main room on their way out. Seeing Crayford, Captain Holding stopped to speak to him.

“I have a casualty to report,” said the captain, “which diminishes our numbers by one. My second lieutenant, who was to have joined the exploring party, has had a fall on the ice. Judging by what the quartermaster tells me, I am afraid the poor fellow has broken his leg.”

“I will supply his place,” cried a voice at the other end of the hut.

Everybody looked round. The man who had spoken was Richard Wardour.

Crayford instantly interfered—so vehemently as to astonish all who knew him.

“No!” he said. “Not you, Richard! not you!”

“Why not?” Wardour asked, sternly.

“Why not, indeed?” added Captain Holding.

“Wardour is the very man to be useful on a

long march. He is in perfect health, and he is the best shot among us. I was on the point of proposing him myself."

Crayford failed to show his customary respect for his superior officer. He openly disputed the captain's conclusion.

"Wardour has no right to volunteer," he rejoined. "It has been settled, Captain Holding, that chance shall decide who is to go and who is to stay."

"And chance *has* decided it," cried Wardour. "Do you think we are going to cast the dice again, and give an officer of the *Sea-mew* a chance of replacing an officer of the *Wanderer*? There is a vacancy in our party, not in yours; and we claim the right of filling it as we please. I volunteer, and my captain backs me. Whose authority is to keep me here after that?"

"Gently, Wardour," said Captain Holding. "A man who is in the right can afford to speak with moderation." He turned to Crayford. "You must admit yourself," he continued, "that Wardour is right this time. The missing man belongs to my command, and in common justice one of my officers ought to supply his place."

It was impossible to dispute the matter further. The dullest man present could see that the captain's reply was unanswerable. In sheer despair, Crayford took Frank's arm and led him aside a few steps. The last chance left of parting the two men was the chance of appealing to Frank.

"My dear boy," he began, "I want to say one

friendly word to you on the subject of your health. I have already, if you remember, expressed my doubts whether you are strong enough to make one of an exploring party. I feel those doubts more strongly than ever at this moment. Will you take the advice of a friend who wishes you well?"

Wardour had followed Crayford. Wardour roughly interposed before Frank could reply.

"Let him alone!"

Crayford paid no heed to the interruption. He was too earnestly bent on withdrawing Frank from the expedition to notice anything that was said or done by the persons about him.

"Don't, pray don't, risk hardships which you are unfit to bear!" he went on, entreatingly. "Your place can be easily filled. Change your mind, Frank. Stay here with me."

Again Wardour interfered. Again he called out, "Leave him alone!" more roughly than ever. Still deaf and blind to every consideration but one, Crayford pressed his entreaties on Frank.

"You owned yourself just now that you were not well seasoned to fatigue," he persisted. "You feel (you *must* feel) how weak that last illness has left you? You know (I am sure you know) how unfit you are to brave exposure to cold, and long marches over the snow."

Irritated beyond endurance by Crayford's obstinacy; seeing, or thinking he saw, signs of yielding in Frank's face, Wardour so far forgot himself as to seize Crayford by the arm and at-

tempt to drag him away from Frank. Crayford turned and looked at him.

“Richard,” he said, very quietly, “you are not yourself. I pity you. Drop your hand.”

Wardour relaxed his hold, with something of the sullen submission of a wild animal to its keeper. The momentary silence which followed gave Frank an opportunity of speaking at last.

“I am gratefully sensible, Crayford,” he began, “of the interest which you take in me—”

“And you will follow my advice?” Crayford interposed, eagerly.

“My mind is made up, old friend,” Frank answered, firmly and sadly. “Forgive me for disappointing you. I am appointed to the expedition. With the expedition I go.” He moved nearer to Wardour. In his innocence of all suspicion he clapped Wardour heartily on the shoulder. “When I feel the fatigue,” said poor simple Frank, “you will help me, comrade—won’t you? Come along!”

Wardour snatched his gun out of the hands of the sailor who was carrying it for him. His dark face became suddenly irradiated with a terrible joy.

“Come!” he cried. “Over the snow and over the ice! Come! where no human footsteps have ever trodden, and where no human trace is ever left.”

Blindly, instinctively, Crayford made an effort to part them. His brother officers, standing near, pulled him back. They looked at each other anxiously. The merciless cold, striking

its victims in various ways, had struck in some instances at their reason first. Everybody loved Crayford. Was he, too, going on the dark way that others had taken before him? They forced him to seat himself on one of the lockers. "Steady, old fellow!" they said kindly—"steady!" Crayford yielded, writhing inwardly under the sense of his own helplessness. What in God's name could he do? Could he denounce Wardour to Captain Holding on bare suspicion—without so much as the shadow of a proof to justify what he said? The captain would decline to insult one of his officers by even mentioning the monstrous accusation to him. The captain would conclude, as others had already concluded, that Crayford's mind was giving way under stress of cold and privation. No hope—literally, no hope now, but in the numbers of the expedition. Officers and men, they all liked Frank. As long as they could stir hand or foot, they would help him on the way—they would see that no harm came to him.

The word of command was given; the door was thrown open; the hut emptied rapidly. Over the merciless white snow—under the merciless black sky—the exploring party began to move. The sick and helpless men, whose last hope of rescue centered in their departing messmates, cheered faintly. Some few whose days were numbered sobbed and cried like women. Frank's voice faltered as he turned back at the door to say his last words to the friend who had been a father to him.

“God bless you, Crayford!”

Crayford broke away from the officers near him; and, hurrying forward, seized Frank by both hands. Crayford held him as if he would never let him go.

“God preserve you, Frank! I would give all I have in the world to be with you. Good-by! Good-by!”

Frank waved his hand—dashed away the tears that were gathering in his eyes—and hurried out. Crayford called after him, the last, the only warning that he could give:

“While you can stand, keep with the main body, Frank!”

Wardour, waiting till the last—Wardour, following Frank through the snow-drift—stopped, stepped back, and answered Crayford at the door:

“While he can stand, he keeps with Me.”

THIRD SCENE.—THE ICEBERG.

CHAPTER XII.

ALONE! alone on the Frozen Deep!

The Arctic sun is rising dimly in the dreary sky. The beams of the cold northern moon, mingling strangely with the dawning light, clothe the snowy plains in hues of livid gray. An ice-field on the far horizon is moving slowly southward in the spectral light. Nearer, a stream

of open water rolls its slow black waves past the edges of the ice. Nearer still, following the drift, an iceberg rears its crags and pinnacles to the sky; here, glittering in the moonbeams; there, looming dim and ghost-like in the ashy light.

Midway on the long sweep of the lower slope of the iceberg, what objects rise, and break the desolate monotony of the scene? In this awful solitude, can signs appear which tell of human life? Yes! The black outline of a boat just shows itself, hauled up on the berg. In an ice-cavern behind the boat the last red embers of a dying fire flicker from time to time over the figures of two men. One is seated, resting his back against the side of the cavern. The other lies prostrate, with his head on his comrade's knee. The first of these men is awake, and thinking. The second reclines, with his still white face turned up to the sky—sleeping or dead. Days and days since, these two have fallen behind on the march of the expedition of relief. Days and days since, these two have been given up by their weary and failing companions as doomed and lost. He who sits thinking is Richard Wardour. He who lies sleeping or dead is Frank Aldersley.

The iceberg drifts slowly, over the black water, through the ashy light. Minute by minute the dying fire sinks. Minute by minute the deathly cold creeps nearer and nearer to the lost men.

Richard Wardour rouses himself from his thoughts—looks at the still white face beneath him—and places his hand on Frank's heart. It

still beats feebly. Give him his share of the food and fuel still stored in the boat, and Frank may live through it. Leave him neglected where he lies, and his death is a question of hours—perhaps minutes; who knows?

Richard Wardour lifts the sleeper's head and rests it against the cavern side. He goes to the boat, and returns with a billet of wood. He stoops to place the wood on the fire—and stops. Frank is dreaming, and murmuring in his dream. A woman's name passes his lips. Frank is in England again—at the ball—whispering to Clara the confession of his love.

Over Richard Wardour's face there passes the shadow of a deadly thought. He rises from the fire; he takes the wood back to the boat. His iron strength is shaken, but it still holds out. They are drifting nearer and nearer to the open sea. He can launch the boat without help; he can take the food and the fuel with him. The sleeper on the iceberg is the man who has robbed him of Clara—who has wrecked the hope and the happiness of his life. Leave the man in his sleep, and let him die!

So the tempter whispers. Richard Wardour tries his strength on the boat. It moves: he has got it under control. He stops, and looks round. Beyond him is the open sea. Beneath him is the man who has robbed him of Clara. The shadow of the deadly thought grows and darkens over his face. He waits with his hands on the boat—waits and thinks.

The iceberg drifts slowly—over the black

water; through the ashy light. Minute by minute, the dying fire sinks. Minute by minute, the deathly cold creeps nearer to the sleeping man. And still Richard Wardour waits—waits and thinks.

FOURTH SCENE.—THE GARDEN.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE spring has come. The air of the April night just lifts the leaves of the sleeping flowers. The moon is queen in the cloudless and starless sky. The stillness of the midnight hour is abroad, over land and over sea.

In a villa on the westward shore of the Isle of Wight, the glass doors which lead from the drawing-room to the garden are yet open. The shaded lamp yet burns on the table. A lady sits by the lamp, reading. From time to time she looks out into the garden, and sees the white-robed figure of a young girl pacing slowly to and fro in the soft brightness of the moonlight on the lawn. Sorrow and suspense have set their mark on the lady. Not rivals only, but friends who formerly admired her, agree now that she looks worn and aged. The more merciful judgment of others remarks, with equal truth, that her eyes, her hair, her simple grace and grandeur of movement have lost but little of

their olden charms. The truth lies, as usual, between the two extremes. In spite of sorrow and suffering, Mrs. Crayford is the beautiful Mrs. Crayford still.

The delicious silence of the hour is softly disturbed by the voice of the younger lady in the garden.

“Go to the piano, Lucy. It is a night for music. Play something that is worthy of the night.”

Mrs. Crayford looks round at the clock on the mantel-piece.

“My dear Clara, it is past twelve! Remember what the doctor told you. You ought to have been in bed an hour ago.”

“Half an hour, Lucy—give me half an hour more! Look at the moonlight on the sea. Is it possible to go to bed on such a night as this? Play something, Lucy—something spiritual and divine.”

Earnestly pleading with her friend, Clara advances toward the window. She too has suffered under the wasting influences of suspense. Her face has lost its youthful freshness; no delicate flush of color rises on it when she speaks. The soft gray eyes which won Frank’s heart in the by-gone time are sadly altered now. In repose, they have a dimmed and wearied look. In action, they are wild and restless, like eyes suddenly wakened from startling dreams. Robed in white—her soft brown hair hanging loosely over her shoulders—there is something weird and ghost-like in the girl, as she moves nearer

and nearer to the window in the full light of the moon—pleading for music that shall be worthy of the mystery and the beauty of the night.

“Will you come in here if I play to you?” Mrs. Crayford asks. “It is a risk, my love, to be out so long in the night air.”

“No! no! I like it. Play—while I am out here looking at the sea. It quiets me; it comforts me; it does me good.”

She glides back, ghost-like, over the lawn. Mrs. Crayford rises, and puts down the volume that she has been reading. It is a record of explorations in the Arctic seas. The time has gone by when the two lonely women could take an interest in subjects not connected with their own anxieties. Now, when hope is fast failing them—now, when their last news of the *Wanderer* and the *Sea-mew* is news that is more than two years old—they can read of nothing, they can think of nothing, but dangers and discoveries, losses and rescues in the terrible Polar seas.

Unwillingly, Mrs. Crayford puts her book aside, and opens the piano—Mozart’s “Air in A, with Variations,” lies open on the instrument. One after another she plays the lovely melodies, so simply, so purely beautiful, of that unpretending and unrivaled work. At the close of the ninth Variation (Clara’s favorite), she pauses, and turns toward the garden.

“Shall I stop there?” she asks.

There is no answer. Has Clara wandered away out of hearing of the music that she loves

—the music that harmonizes so subtly with the tender beauty of the night? Mrs. Crayford rises and advances to the window.

No! there is the white figure standing alone on the slope of the lawn—the head turned away from the house; the face looking out over the calm sea, whose gently rippling waters end in the dim line on the horizon which is the line of the Hampshire coast.

Mrs. Crayford advances as far as the path before the window, and calls to her.

“Clara!”

Again there is no answer. The white figure still stands immovably in its place.

With signs of distress in her face, but with no appearance of alarm, Mrs. Crayford returns to the room. Her own sad experience tells her what has happened. She summons the servants and directs them to wait in the drawing-room until she calls to them. This done, she returns to the garden, and approaches the mysterious figure on the lawn.

Dead to the outer world, as if she lay already in her grave—insensible to touch, insensible to sound, motionless as stone, cold as stone—Clara stands on the moonlit lawn, facing the seaward view. Mrs. Crayford waits at her side, patiently watching for the change which she knows is to come. “Catalepsy,” as some call it—“hysteria,” as others say—this alone is certain, the same interval always passes; the same change always appears.

It comes now. Not a change in her eyes; they

still remain wide open, fixed and glassy. The first movement is a movement of her hands. They rise slowly from her side and waver in the air like the hands of a person groping in the dark. Another interval, and the movement spreads to her lips: they part and tremble. A few minutes more, and words begin to drop, one by one, from those parted lips—words spoken in a lost, vacant tone, as if she is talking in her sleep.

Mrs. Crayford looks back at the house. Sad experience makes her suspicious of the servants' curiosity. Sad experience has long since warned her that the servants are not to be trusted within hearing of the wild words which Clara speaks in the trance. Has any one of them ventured into the garden? No. They are out of hearing at the window, waiting for the signal which tells them that their help is needed.

Turning toward Clara once more, Mrs. Crayford hears the vacantly uttered words, falling faster and faster from her lips.

“Frank! Frank! Frank! Don't drop behind—don't trust Richard Wardour. While you can stand, keep with the other men, Frank!”

(The farewell warning of Crayford in the solitudes of the Frozen Deep, repeated by Clara in the garden of her English home!)

A moment of silence follows; and, in that moment, the vision has changed. She sees him on the iceberg now, at the mercy of the bitterest enemy he has on earth. She sees him drifting—over the black water, through the ashy light.

“Wake, Frank! wake and defend yourself! Richard Wardour knows that I love you—Richard Wardour’s vengeance will take your life! Wake, Frank—wake! You are drifting to your death!” A low groan of horror burst from her, sinister and terrible to hear. “Drifting! drifting!” she whispers to herself—“drifting to his death!”

Her glassy eyes suddenly soften—then close. A long shudder runs through her. A faint flush shows itself on the deadly pallor of her face, and fades again. Her limbs fail her. She sinks into Mrs. Crayford’s arms.

The servants, answering the call for help, carry her into the house. They lay her insensible on her bed. After half an hour or more, her eyes open again—this time with the light of life in them—open, and rest languidly on the friend sitting by the bedside.

“I have had a dreadful dream,” she murmurs faintly. “Am I ill, Lucy? I feel so weak.”

Even as she says the words, sleep, gentle, natural sleep, takes her suddenly, as it takes young children weary with their play. Though it is all over now, though no further watching is required, Mrs. Crayford still keeps her place by the bedside, too anxious and too wakeful to retire to her own room.

On other occasions, she is accustomed to dismiss from her mind the words which drop from Clara in the trance. This time the effort to dismiss them is beyond her power. The words haunt her. Vainly she recalls to memory all

that the doctors have said to her, in speaking of Clara in the state of trance. "What she vaguely dreads for the lost man whom she loves is mingled in her mind with what she is constantly reading, of trials, dangers, and escapes in the Arctic seas. The most startling things that she may say or do are all attributable to this cause, and may all be explained in this way." So the doctors have spoken; and, thus far, Mrs. Crayford has shared their view. It is only to-night that the girl's words ring in her ear, with a strange prophetic sound in them. It is only to-night that she asks herself: "Is Clara present, in the spirit, with our loved and lost ones in the lonely North? Can mortal vision see the dead and living in the solitudes of the Frozen Deep?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE night had passed.

Far and near the garden view looked its gayest and brightest in the light of the noonday sun. The cheering sounds which tell of life and action were audible all round the villa. From the garden of the nearest house rose the voices of children at play. Along the road at the back sounded the roll of wheels, as carts and carriages passed at intervals. Out on the blue sea, the distant splash of the paddles, the distant thump of the engines, told from time to time of the passage of steamers, entering or leaving the strait

between the island and the mainland. In the trees, the birds sang gayly among the rustling leaves. In the house, the women-servants were laughing over some jest or story that cheered them at their work. It was a lively and pleasant time—a bright, enjoyable day.

The two ladies were out together; resting on a garden seat, after a walk round the grounds.

They exchanged a few trivial words relating to the beauty of the day, and then said no more. Possessing the same consciousness of what she had seen in the Trance which persons in general possess of what they have seen in a dream—believing in the vision as a supernatural revelation—Clara's worst forebodings were now, to her mind, realized as truths. Her last faint hope of ever seeing Frank again was now at an end. Intimate experience of her told Mrs. Crayford what was passing in Clara's mind, and warned her that the attempt to reason and remonstrate would be little better than a voluntary waste of words and time. The disposition which she had herself felt on the previous night, to attach a superstitious importance to the words that Clara had spoken in the Trance, had vanished with the return of the morning. Rest and reflection had quieted her mind, and had restored the composing influence of her sober sense. Sympathizing with Clara in all besides, she had no sympathy, as they sat together in the pleasant sunshine, with Clara's gloomy despair of the future. She, who could still hope, had nothing to say to the sad companion who had done with hope. So the

quiet minutes succeeded each other, and the two friends sat side by side in silence.

An hour passed, and the gate-bell of the villa rang.

They both started—they both knew the ring. It was the hour when the postman brought their newspapers from London. In past days, what hundreds on hundreds of times they had torn off the cover which inclosed the newspaper, and looked at the same column with the same weary mingling of hope and despair! There to-day—as it was yesterday; as it would be, if they lived, to-morrow—there was the servant with Lucy's newspaper and Clara's newspaper in his hand! Would both of them do again to-day what both had done so often in the days that were gone?

No! Mrs. Crayford removed the cover from her newspaper as usual. Clara laid *her* newspaper aside, unopened, on the garden seat.

In silence, Mrs. Crayford looked, where she always looked, at the column devoted to the Latest Intelligence from foreign parts. The instant her eye fell on the page she started with a loud cry of joy. The newspaper fell from her trembling hand. She caught Clara in her arms. "Oh, my darling! my darling! news of them at last."

Without answering, without the slightest change in look or manner, Clara took the newspaper from the ground, and read the top line in the column, printed in capital letters:

THE ARCTIC EXPEDITION.

She waited, and looked at Mrs. Crayford.

“Can you bear to hear it, Lucy,” she asked, “if I read it aloud?”

Mrs. Crayford was too agitated to answer in words. She signed impatiently to Clara to go on.

Clara read the news which followed the heading in capital letters. Thus it ran:

“The following intelligence, from St. Johns, Newfoundland, has reached us for publication. The whaling-vessel *Blythewood* is reported to have met with the surviving officers and men of the Expedition in Davis Strait. Many are stated to be dead, and some are supposed to be missing. The list of the saved, as collected by the people of the whaler, is not vouched for as being absolutely correct, the circumstances having been adverse to investigation. The vessel was pressed for time; and the members of the Expedition, all more or less suffering from exhaustion, were not in a position to give the necessary assistance to inquiry. Further particulars may be looked for by the next mail.”

The list of the survivors followed, beginning with the officers in the order of their rank. They both read the list together. The first name was Captain Holding; the second was Lieutenant Crayford.

There the wife's joy overpowered her. After a pause, she put her arm around Clara's waist, and spoke to her.

“Oh, my love!” she murmured, “are you as happy as I am? Is Frank's name there too? The tears are in my eyes. Read for me—I can't read for myself.”

The answer came, in still, sad tones:

“I have read as far as your husband’s name. I have no need to read further.”

Mrs. Crayford dashed the tears from her eyes—steadied herself—and looked at the newspaper.

On the list of the survivors, the search was vain. Frank’s name was not among them. On a second list, headed “Dead or Missing,” the first two names that appeared were:

FRANCIS ALDERSLEY.

RICHARD WARDOUR.

In speechless distress and dismay, Mrs. Crayford looked at Clara. Had she force enough in her feeble health to sustain the shock that had fallen on her? Yes! she bore it with a strange unnatural resignation—she looked, she spoke, with the sad self-possession of despair.

“I was prepared for it,” she said. “I saw them in the spirit last night. Richard Wardour has discovered the truth; and Frank has paid the penalty with his life—and I, I alone, am to blame.” She shuddered, and put her hand on her heart. “We shall not be long parted, Lucy. I shall go to him. He will not return to me.”

Those words were spoken with a calm certainty of conviction that was terrible to hear. “I have no more to say,” she added, after a moment, and rose to return to the house. Mrs. Crayford caught her by the hand, and forced her to take her seat again.

“Don’t look at me, don’t speak to me, in that horrible manner!” she exclaimed. “Clara! it is unworthy of a reasonable being, it is doubting

the mercy of God, to say what you have just said. Look at the newspaper again. See! They tell you plainly that their information is not to be depended on—they warn you to wait for further particulars. The very words at the top of the list show how little they knew of the truth. ‘Dead *or* Missing!’ On their own showing, it is quite as likely that Frank is missing as that Frank is dead. For all you know, the next mail may bring a letter from him. Are you listening to me?”

“Yes.”

“Can you deny what I say?”

“No.”

“‘Yes!’ ‘No!’ Is that the way to answer me when I am so distressed and so anxious about you?”

“I am sorry I spoke as I did, Lucy. We look at some subjects in very different ways. I don’t dispute, dear, that yours is the reasonable view.”

“‘You don’t dispute?’” retorted Mrs. Crayford, warmly. “No! you do what is worse—you believe in your own opinion; you persist in your own conclusion—with the newspaper before you! Do you, or do you not, believe the newspaper?”

“I believe in what I saw last night.”

“In what you saw last night! You, an educated woman, a clever woman, believing in a vision of your own fancy—a mere dream! I wonder you are not ashamed to acknowledge it!”

“Call it a dream if you like, Lucy. I have had other dreams at other times—and I have known them to be fulfilled.”

“Yes!” said Mrs. Crayford. “For once in a way they may have been fulfilled, by chance—and you notice it, and remember it, and pin your faith on it. Come, Clara, be honest!—What about the occasions when the chance has been against you, and your dreams have *not* been fulfilled? You superstitious people are all alike. You conveniently forget when your dreams and your presentiments prove false. For my sake, dear, if not for your own,” she continued, in gentler and tenderer tones, “try to be more reasonable and more hopeful. Don’t lose your trust in the future, and your trust in God. God, who has saved my husband, can save Frank. While there is doubt, there is hope. Don’t imbitter my happiness, Clara! Try to think as I think—if it is only to show that you love me.”

She put her arm round the girl’s neck, and kissed her. Clara returned the kiss; Clara answered, sadly and submissively,

“I do love you, Lucy. I *will* try.”

Having answered in those terms, she sighed to herself, and said no more. It would have been plain, only too plain, to far less observant eyes than Mrs. Crayford’s, that no salutary impression had been produced on her. She had ceased to defend her own way of thinking, she spoke of it no more—but there was the terrible conviction of Frank’s death at Wardour’s hands rooted as firmly as ever in her mind! Discouraged and distressed, Mrs. Crayford left her, and walked back toward the house.

CHAPTER XV.

AT the drawing-room window of the villa there appeared a polite little man, with bright intelligent eyes, and cheerful sociable manners. Neatly dressed in professional black, he stood, self-proclaimed, a prosperous country doctor—successful and popular in a wide circle of patients and friends. As Mrs. Crayford approached him, he stepped out briskly to meet her on the lawn, with both hands extended in courteous and cordial greeting.

“My dear madam, accept my heartfelt congratulations!” cried the doctor. “I have seen the good news in the paper; and I could hardly feel more rejoiced than I do now if I had the honor of knowing Lieutenant Crayford personally. We mean to celebrate the occasion at home. I said to my wife before I came out, ‘A bottle of the old Madeira at dinner to-day, mind!—to drink the lieutenant’s health; God bless him!’ And how is our interesting patient? The news is not altogether what we could wish, so far as she is concerned. I felt a little anxious, to tell you the truth, about the effect of it; and I have paid my visit to-day before my usual time. Not that I take a gloomy view of the news myself. No! There is clearly a doubt about the correctness of the information, so far as Mr. Aldersley is concerned—and that is a point, a great point in Mr. Aldersley’s favor. I give him the benefit

of the doubt, as the lawyers say. Does Miss Burnham give him the benefit of the doubt too? I hardly dare hope it, I confess."

"Miss Burnham has grieved and alarmed me," Mrs. Crayford answered. "I was just thinking of sending for you when we met here."

With those introductory words, she told the doctor exactly what had happened; repeating not only the conversation of that morning between Clara and herself, but also the words which had fallen from Clara, in the trance of the past night.

The doctor listened attentively. Little by little its easy smiling composure vanished from his face, as Mrs. Crayford went on, and left him completely transformed into a grave and thoughtful man.

"Let us go and look at her," he said.

He seated himself by Clara's side, and carefully studied her face, with his hand on her pulse. There was no sympathy here between the dreamy mystical temperament of the patient and the downright practical character of the doctor. Clara secretly disliked her medical attendant. She submitted impatiently to the close investigation of which he made her the object. He questioned her—and she answered irritably. Advancing a step further (the doctor was not easily discouraged) he adverted to the news of the Expedition, and took up the tone of remonstrance which had been already adopted by Mrs. Crayford. Clara declined to discuss the question. She rose with formal politeness, and requested

permission to return to the house. The doctor attempted no further resistance. "By all means, Miss Burnham," he answered, resignedly—having first cast a look at Mrs. Crayford which said plainly, "Stay here with me." Clara bowed her acknowledgments in cold silence, and left them together. The doctor's bright eyes followed the girl's wasted, yet still graceful figure as it slowly receded from view, with an expression of grave anxiety which Mrs. Crayford noticed with grave misgiving on her side. He said nothing, until Clara had disappeared under the veranda which ran round the garden-side of the house.

"I think you told me," he began, "that Miss Burnham has neither father nor mother living?"

"Yes. Miss Burnham is an orphan."

"Has she any near relatives?"

"No. You may speak to me as her guardian and her friend. Are you alarmed about her?"

"I am seriously alarmed. It is only two days since I called here last, and I see a marked change in her for the worse—physically and morally, a change for the worse. Don't needlessly alarm yourself! The case is not, I trust, entirely beyond the reach of remedy. The great hope for us is the hope that Mr. Aldersley may still be living. In that event, I should feel no misgivings about the future. Her marriage would make a healthy and a happy woman of her. But as things are, I own I dread that settled conviction in her mind that Mr. Aldersley is dead, and that her own death is soon to follow. In her present state of health this idea (haunting her

as it certainly will night and day) will have its influence on her body as well as on her mind. Unless we can check the mischief, her last reserves of strength will give way. If you wish for other advice, by all means send for it. You have my opinion."

"I am quite satisfied with your opinion," Mrs. Crayford replied. "For God's sake, tell me, what can we do?"

"We can try a complete change," said the doctor. "We can remove her at once from this place."

"She will refuse to leave it," Mrs. Crayford rejoined. "I have more than once proposed a change to her—and she always says No."

The doctor paused for a moment, like a man collecting his thoughts.

"I heard something on my way here," he proceeded, "which suggests to my mind a method of meeting the difficulty that you have just mentioned. Unless I am entirely mistaken, Miss Burnham will not say No to the change that I have in view for her."

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Crayford, eagerly.

"Pardon me if I ask you a question, on my part, before I reply," said the doctor. "Are you fortunate enough to possess any interest at the Admiralty?"

"Certainly. My father is in the Secretary's office; and two of the Lords of the Admiralty are friends of his."

"Excellent! Now I can speak out plainly with little fear of disappointing you. After what

I have said, you will agree with me, that the only change in Miss Burnham's life which will be of any use to her is a change that will alter the present tone of her mind on the subject of Mr. Aldersley. Place her in a position to discover—not by reference to her own distempered fancies and visions, but by reference to actual evidence and actual fact—whether Mr. Aldersley is, or is not, a living man; and there will be an end of the hysterical delusions which now threaten to fatally undermine her health. Even taking matters at their worst—even assuming that Mr. Aldersley has died in the Arctic seas—it will be less injurious to her to discover this positively, than to leave her mind to feed on its own morbid superstitions and speculations, for weeks and weeks together, while the next news from the Expedition is on its way to England. In one word, I want you to be in a position, before the week is out, to put Miss Burnham's present conviction to a practical test. Suppose you could say to her, 'We differ, my dear, about Mr. Francis Aldersley. You declare, without the shadow of a reason for it, that he is certainly dead, and, worse still, that he has died by the act of one of his brother officers. I assert, on the authority of the newspaper, that nothing of the sort has happened, and that the chances are all in favor of his being still a living man. What do you say to crossing the Atlantic, and deciding which of us is right—you or I?' Do you think Miss Burnham will say No to that, Mrs. Crayford? If I know anything of human nature, she

will seize the opportunity as a means of converting you to a belief in the Second Sight."

"Good Heavens, doctor! do you mean to tell me that we are to go to sea and meet the Arctic Expedition on its way home?"

"Admirably guessed, Mrs. Crayford! That is exactly what I mean."

"But how is it to be done?"

"I will tell you immediately. I mentioned—didn't I?—that I had heard something on my road to this house."

"Yes."

"Well, I met an old friend at my own gate, who walked with me a part of the way here. Last night my friend dined with the admiral at Portsmouth. Among the guests there was a member of the Ministry who had brought the news about the Expedition with him from London. This gentleman told the company there was very little doubt that the Admiralty would immediately send out a steam-vessel, to meet the rescued men on the shores of America, and bring them home. Wait a little, Mrs. Crayford! Nobody knows, as yet, under what rules and regulations the vessel will sail. Under somewhat similar circumstances, privileged people *have* been received as passengers, or rather as guests, in her majesty's ships—and what has been conceded on former occasions may, by bare possibility, be conceded now. I can say no more. If you are not afraid of the voyage for yourself, I am not afraid of it (nay, I am all in favor of it on medical grounds) for my patient. What do

you say? Will you write to your father, and ask him to try what his interest will do with his friends at the Admiralty?"

Mrs. Crayford rose excitedly to her feet.

"Write!" she exclaimed. "I will do better than write. The journey to London is no great matter—and my housekeeper here is to be trusted to take care of Clara in my absence. I will see my father to-night! He shall make good use of his interest at the Admiralty—you may rely on that. Oh, my dear doctor, what a prospect it is! My husband! Clara! What a discovery you have made—what a treasure you are! How can I thank you?"

"Compose yourself, my dear madam. Don't make too sure of success. We may consider Miss Burnham's objections as disposed of beforehand. But suppose the Lords of the Admiralty say No?"

"In that case, I shall be in London, doctor; and I shall go to them myself. Lords are only men; and men are not in the habit of saying No to *me*."

So they parted.

In a week from that day, her majesty's ship *Amazon* sailed for North America. Certain privileged persons, specially interested in the Arctic voyagers, were permitted to occupy the empty state-rooms on board. On the list of these favored guests of the ship were the names of two ladies—Mrs. Crayford and Miss Burnham.

FIFTH SCENE.—THE BOAT-HOUSE.

CHAPTER XVI.

ONCE more the open sea—the sea whose waters break on the shores of Newfoundland! An English steamship lies at anchor in the offing. The vessel is plainly visible through the open doorway of a large boat-house on the shore—one of the buildings attached to a fishing-station on the coast of the island.

The only person in the boat-house at this moment is a man in the dress of a sailor. He is seated on a chest, with a piece of cord in his hand, looking out idly at the sea. On the rough carpenter's table near him lies a strange object to be left in such a place—a woman's veil.

What is the vessel lying at anchor in the offing?

The vessel is the *Amazon*—dispatched from England to receive the surviving officers and men of the Arctic Expedition. The meeting has been successfully effected, on the shores of North America, three days since. But the homeward voyage has been delayed by a storm which has driven the ship out of her course. Taking advantage, on the third day, of the first returning calm, the commander of the *Amazon* has anchored off the coast of Newfoundland, and has sent ashore to increase his supplies of water before he sails for England. The weary passengers

have landed for a few hours, to refresh themselves after the discomforts of the tempest. Among them are the two ladies. The veil left on the table in the boat-house is Clara's veil.

And who is the man sitting on the chest, with the cord in his hand, looking out idly at the sea? The man is the only cheerful person in the ship's company. In other words—John Want.

Still reposing on the chest, our friend, who never grumbles, is surprised by the sudden appearance of a sailor at the boat-house door.

“Look sharp with your work there, John Want!” says the sailor. “Lieutenant Crayford is just coming in to look after you.”

With this warning the messenger disappears again. John Want rises with a groan, turns the chest up on one end, and begins to fasten the cord round it. The ship's cook is not a man to look back on his rescue with the feeling of unmitigated satisfaction which animates his companions in trouble. On the contrary, he is ungratefully disposed to regret the North Pole.

“If I had only known”—thus runs the train of thought in the mind of John Want—“if I had only known, before I was rescued, that I was to be brought to this place, I believe I should have preferred staying at the North Pole. I was very happy keeping up everybody's spirits at the North Pole. Taking one thing with another, I think I must have been very comfortable at the North Pole—if I had only known it. Another man in my place might be inclined to say that this Newfoundland boat-house was rather a

sloppy, slimy, draughty, fishy sort of a habitation to take shelter in. Another man might object to perpetual Newfoundland fogs, perpetual Newfoundland cod-fish, and perpetual Newfoundland dogs. We had some very nice bears at the North Pole. Never mind! it's all one to me—I don't grumble."

"Have you done cording that box?"

This time the voice is a voice of authority—the man at the doorway is Lieutenant Crayford himself. John Want answers his officer in his own cheerful way.

"I've done it as well as I can, sir—but the damp of this place is beginning to tell upon our very ropes. I say nothing about our lungs—I only say our ropes."

Crayford answers sharply. He seems to have lost his former relish for the humor of John Want.

"Pooh! To look at your wry face, one would think that our rescue from the Arctic regions was a downright misfortune. You deserve to be sent back again."

"I could be just as cheerful as ever, sir, if I *was* sent back again. I hope I'm thankful; but I don't like to hear the North Pole run down in such a fishy place as this. It was very clean and snowy at the North Pole—and it's very damp and sandy here. Do you never miss your bone-soup, sir? *I* do. It mightn't have been strong; but it was very hot; and the cold seemed to give it a kind of a meaty flavor as it went down. Was it you that was a-coughing so long last night,

sir? I don't presume to say anything against the air of these latitudes; but I should be glad to know it wasn't you that was a-coughing so hollow. Would you be so obliging as just to feel the state of these ropes with the ends of your fingers, sir? You can dry them afterward on the back of my jacket."

"You ought to have a stick laid on the back of your jacket. Take that box down to the boat directly. You croaking vagabond! You would have grumbled in the Garden of Eden."

The philosopher of the Expedition was not a man to be silenced by referring him to the Garden of Eden. Paradise itself was not perfect to John Want.

"I hope I could be cheerful anywhere, sir," said the ship's cook. "But you mark my words—there must have been a deal of troublesome work with the flower-beds in the Garden of Eden."

Having entered that unanswerable protest, John Want shouldered the box, and drifted drearily out of the boat-house.

Left by himself, Crayford looked at his watch, and called to a sailor outside.

"Where are the ladies?" he asked.

"Mrs. Crayford is coming this way, sir. She was just behind you when you came in."

"Is Miss Burnham with her?"

"No, sir; Miss Burnham is down on the beach with the passengers. I heard the young lady asking after you, sir."

"Asking after me?" Crayford considered

with himself as he repeated the words. He added, in lower and graver tones, "You had better tell Miss Burnham you have seen me here."

The man made his salute and went out. Crayford took a turn in the boat-house.

Rescued from death in the Arctic wastes, and reunited to a beautiful wife, the lieutenant looked, nevertheless, unaccountably anxious and depressed. What could he be thinking of? He was thinking of Clara.

On the first day when the rescued men were received on board the *Amazon*, Clara had embarrassed and distressed, not Crayford only, but the other officers of the Expedition as well, by the manner in which she questioned them on the subject of Francis Aldersley and Richard Wardour. She had shown no signs of dismay or despair when she heard that no news had been received of the two missing men. She had even smiled sadly to herself, when Crayford (out of compassionate regard for her) declared that he and his comrades had not given up the hope of seeing Frank and Wardour yet. It was only when the lieutenant had expressed himself in those terms--and when it was hoped that the painful subject had been dismissed--that Clara had startled every one present by announcing that she had something still to say in relation to Frank and Wardour, which had not been said yet. Though she spoke guardedly, her next words revealed suspicions of foul play lurking in her mind--exactly reflecting similar suspicions lurking in Crayford's mind--which so distressed

the lieutenant, and so surprised his comrades, as to render them quite incapable of answering her. The warnings of the storm which shortly afterward broke over the vessel were then visible in sea and sky. Crayford made them his excuse for abruptly leaving the cabin in which the conversation had taken place. His brother officers, profiting by his example, pleaded their duties on deck, and followed him out.

On the next day, and the next, the tempest still raged—and the passengers were not able to leave their state-rooms. But now, when the weather had moderated and the ship had anchored—now, when officers and passengers alike were on shore, with leisure time at their disposal—Clara had opportunities of returning to the subject of the lost men, and of asking questions in relation to them which would make it impossible for Crayford to plead an excuse for not answering her. How was he to meet those questions? How could he still keep her in ignorance of the truth?

These were the reflections which now troubled Crayford, and which presented him, after his rescue, in the strangely inappropriate character of a depressed and anxious man. His brother officers, as he well knew, looked to him to take the chief responsibility. If he declined to accept it, he would instantly confirm the horrible suspicion in Clara's mind. The emergency must be met; but how to meet it—at once honorably and mercifully—was more than Crayford could tell. He was still lost in his own gloomy thoughts

when his wife entered the boat-house. Turning to look at her, he saw his own perturbations and anxieties plainly reflected in Mrs. Crayford's face.

"Have you seen anything of Clara?" he asked. "Is she still on the beach?"

"She is following me to this place," Mrs. Crayford replied. "I have been speaking to her this morning. She is just as resolute as ever to insist on your telling her of the circumstances under which Frank is missing. As things are, you have no alternative but to answer her."

"Help me to answer her, Lucy. Tell me, before she comes in, how this dreadful suspicion first took possession of her. All she could possibly have known when we left England was that the two men were appointed to separate ships. What could have led her to suspect that they had come together?"

"She was firmly persuaded, William, that they *would* come together when the Expedition left England. And she had read in books of Arctic travel, of men left behind by their comrades on the march, and of men adrift on icebergs. With her mind full of these images and forebodings, she saw Frank and Wardour (or dreamed of them) in one of her attacks of trance. I was by her side; I heard what she said at the time. She warned Frank that Wardour had discovered the truth. She called out to him, 'While you can stand, keep with the other men, Frank!'"

"Good God!" cried Crayford; "I warned him myself, almost in those very words, the last time I saw him!"

“Don’t acknowledge it, William! Keep her in ignorance of what you have just told me. She will not take it for what it is—a startling coincidence, and nothing more: She will accept it as positive confirmation of the faith, the miserable superstitious faith, that is in her. So long as you don’t actually know that Frank is dead, and that he has died by Wardour’s hand, deny what she says—mislead her for her own sake—dispute all her conclusions as I dispute them. Help me to raise her to the better and nobler belief in the mercy of God!” She stopped, and looked round nervously at the doorway. “Hush!” she whispered. “Do as I have told you. Clara is here.”

CHAPTER XVII.

CLARA stopped at the doorway, looking backward and forward distrustfully between the husband and wife. Entering the boat-house, and approaching Crayford, she took his arm, and led him away a few steps from the place in which Mrs. Crayford was standing.

“There is no storm now, and there are no duties to be done on board the ship,” she said, with the faint, sad smile which it wrung Crayford’s heart to see. “You are Lucy’s husband, and you have an interest in me for Lucy’s sake. Don’t shrink on that account from giving me pain: I can bear pain. Friend and brother! will you believe that I have courage enough to hear

the worst? Will you promise not to deceive me about Frank?"

The gentle resignation in her voice, the sad pleading in her look, shook Crayford's self-possession at the outset. He answered her in the worst possible manner; he answered evasively.

"My dear Clara," he said, "what have I done that you should suspect me of deceiving you?"

She looked him searchingly in the face, then glanced with renewed distrust at Mrs. Crayford. There was a moment of silence. Before any of the three could speak again, they were interrupted by the appearance of one of Crayford's brother officers, followed by two sailors carrying a hamper between them. Crayford instantly dropped Clara's arm, and seized the welcome opportunity of speaking of other things.

"Any instructions from the ship, Steventon?" he asked, approaching the officer.

"Verbal instructions only," Steventon replied. "The ship will sail with the flood-tide. We shall fire a gun to collect the people, and send another boat ashore. In the meantime here are some refreshments for the passengers. The ship is in a state of confusion; the ladies will eat their luncheon more comfortably here."

Hearing this, Mrs. Crayford took *her* opportunity of silencing Clara next.

"Come, my dear," she said. "Let us lay the cloth before the gentlemen come in."

Clara was too seriously bent on attaining the object which she had in view to be silenced in that way. "I will help you directly," she an-

swered—then crossed the room and addressed herself to the officer, whose name was Steventon.

“Can you spare me a few minutes?” she asked. “I have something to say to you.”

“I am entirely at your service, Miss Burnham.”

Answering in those words, Steventon dismissed the two sailors. Mrs. Crayford looked anxiously at her husband. Crayford whispered to her, “Don’t be alarmed about Steventon. I have cautioned him; his discretion is to be depended on.”

Clara beckoned to Crayford to return to her.

“I will not keep you long,” she said. “I will promise not to distress Mr. Steventon. Young as I am, you shall both find that I am capable of self-control. I won’t ask you to go back to the story of your past sufferings; I only want to be sure that I am right about one thing—I mean about what happened at the time when the exploring party was dispatched in search of help. As I understand it, you cast lots among yourselves who was to go with the party, and who was to remain behind. Frank cast the lot to go.” She paused, shuddering. “And Richard Wardour,” she went on, “cast the lot to remain behind. On your honor, as officers and gentlemen, is this the truth?”

“On my honor,” Crayford answered, “it is the truth.”

“On my honor,” Steventon repeated, “it is the truth.”

She looked at them, carefully considering her next words, before she spoke again.

“You both drew the lot to stay in the huts,” she said, addressing Crayford and Steventon. “And you are both here. Richard Wardour drew the lot to stay, and Richard Wardour is not here. How does his name come to be with Frank’s on the list of the missing?”

The question was a dangerous one to answer. Steventon left it to Crayford to reply. Once again he answered evasively.

“It doesn’t follow, my dear,” he said, “that the two men were missing together because their names happen to come together on the list.”

Clara instantly drew the inevitable conclusion from that ill-considered reply.

“Frank is missing from the party of relief,” she said. “Am I to understand that Wardour is missing from the huts?”

Both Crayford and Steventon hesitated. Mrs. Crayford cast one indignant look at them, and told the necessary lie, without a moment’s hesitation!

“Yes!” she said. “Wardour is missing from the huts.”

Quickly as she had spoken, she had still spoken too late. Clara had noticed the momentary hesitation on the part of the two officers. She turned to Steventon.

“I trust to your honor,” she said, quietly. “Am I right, or wrong, in believing that Mrs. Crayford is mistaken?”

She had addressed herself to the right man of the two. Steventon had no wife present to ex-

ercise authority over him. Steventon, put on his honor, and fairly forced to say something, owned the truth. Wardour had replaced an officer whom accident had disabled from accompanying the party of relief, and Wardour and Frank were missing together.

Clara looked at Mrs. Crayford.

“You hear?” she said. “It is you who are mistaken, not I. What you call ‘Accident,’ what I call ‘Fate,’ brought Richard Wardour and Frank together as members of the same Expedition, after all.” Without waiting for a reply, she again turned to Steventon, and surprised him by changing the painful subject of the conversation of her own accord.

“Have you been in the Highlands of Scotland?” she asked.

“I have never been in the Highlands,” the lieutenant replied.

“Have you ever read, in books about the Highlands, of such a thing as ‘The Second Sight’?”

“Yes.”

“Do you believe in the Second Sight?”

Steventon politely declined to commit himself to a direct reply.

“I don’t know what I might have done, if I had ever been in the Highlands,” he said. “As it is, I have had no opportunities of giving the subject any serious consideration.”

“I won’t put your credulity to the test,” Clara proceeded. “I won’t ask you to believe anything more extraordinary than that I had a

strange dream in England not very long since. My dream showed me what you have just acknowledged—and more than that. How did the two missing men come to be parted from their companions? Were they lost by pure accident, or were they deliberately left behind on the march?"

Crayford made a last vain effort to check her inquiries at the point which they had now reached.

"Neither Steventon nor I were members of the party of relief," he said. "How are we to answer you?"

"Your brother officers who *were* members of the party must have told you what happened," Clara rejoined. "I only ask you and Mr. Steventon to tell me what they told you."

Mrs. Crayford interposed again, with a practical suggestion this time.

"The luncheon is not unpacked yet," she said. "Come, Clara! this is our business, and the time is passing."

"The luncheon can wait a few minutes longer," Clara answered. "Bear with my obstinacy," she went on, laying her hand caressingly on Crayford's shoulder. "Tell me how those two came to be separated from the rest. You have always been the kindest of friends—don't begin to be cruel to me now!"

The tone in which she made her entreaty to Crayford went straight to the sailor's heart. He gave up the hopeless struggle: he let her see a glimpse of the truth.

“On the third day out,” he said, “Frank’s strength failed him. He fell behind the rest from fatigue.”

“Surely they waited for him?”

“It was a serious risk to wait for him, my child. Their lives (and the lives of the men they had left in the huts) depended, in that dreadful climate, on their pushing on. But Frank was a favorite. They waited half a day to give Frank the chance of recovering his strength.”

There he stopped. There the imprudence into which his fondness for Clara had led him showed itself plainly, and closed his lips.

It was too late to take refuge in silence. Clara was determined on hearing more.

She questioned Steventon next.

“Did Frank go on again after the half-day’s rest?” she asked.

“He tried to go on—”

“And failed?”

“Yes.”

“What did the men do when he failed? Did they turn cowards? Did they desert Frank?”

She had purposely used language which might irritate Steventon into answering her plainly. He was a young man—he fell into the snare that she had set for him.

“Not one among them was a coward, Miss Burnham!” he replied, warmly. “You are speaking cruelly and unjustly of as brave a set of fellows as ever lived! The strongest man among them set the example; he volunteered to

stay by Frank, and to bring him on in the track of the exploring party."

There Steventon stopped—conscious, on his side, that he had said too much. Would she ask him who this volunteer was? No. She went straight on to the most embarrassing question that she had put yet—referring to the volunteer, as if Steventon had already mentioned his name.

"What made Richard Wardour so ready to risk his life for Frank's sake?" she said to Crayford. "Did he do it out of friendship for Frank? Surely you can tell me that? Carry your memory back to the days when you were all living in the huts. Were Frank and Wardour friends at that time? Did you never hear any angry words pass between them?"

There Mrs. Crayford saw her opportunity of giving her husband a timely hint.

"My dear child!" she said; "how can you expect him to remember that? There must have been plenty of quarrels among the men, all shut up together, and all weary of each other's company, no doubt."

"Plenty of quarrels!" Crayford repeated; "and every one of them made up again."

"And every one of them made up again," Mrs. Crayford reiterated, in her turn. "There! a plainer answer than that you can't wish to have. *Now* are you satisfied? Mr. Steventon, come and lend a hand (as you say at sea) with the hamper—Clara won't help me. William, don't stand there doing nothing. This hamper holds a great deal; we must have a division of

labor. Your division shall be laying the table-cloth. Don't handle it in that clumsy way! You unfold a table-cloth as if you were unfurling a sail. Put the knives on the right, and the forks on the left, and the napkin and the bread between them. Clara, if you are not hungry in this fine air, you ought to be. Come and do your duty; come and have some lunch!"

She looked up as she spoke. Clara appeared to have yielded at last to the conspiracy to keep her in the dark. She had returned slowly to the boat-house doorway, and she was standing alone on the threshold, looking out. Approaching her to lead her to the luncheon-table, Mrs. Crayford could hear that she was speaking softly to herself. She was repeating the farewell words which Richard Wardour had spoken to her at the ball.

" 'A time may come when I shall forgive *you*. But the man who has robbed me of you shall rue the day when you and he first met.' O, Frank! Frank! does Richard still live, with your blood on his conscience, and my image in his heart?"

Her lips suddenly closed. She started, and drew back from the doorway, trembling violently. Mrs. Crayford looked out at the quiet seaward view.

"Anything there that frightens you, my dear?" she asked. "I can see nothing, except the boats drawn up on the beach."

"I can see nothing either, Lucy."

"And yet you are trembling as if there was something dreadful in the view from this door."

"There *is* something dreadful! I feel it, though I see nothing. I feel it, nearer and nearer in the empty air, darker and darker in the sunny light. I don't know what it is. Take me away! No. Not out on the beach. I can't pass the door. Somewhere else! somewhere else!"

Mrs. Crayford looked round her, and noticed a second door at the inner end of the boat-house. She spoke to her husband.

"See where that door leads to, William."

Crayford opened the door. It led into a desolate inclosure, half garden, half yard. Some nets stretched on poles were hanging up to dry. No other objects were visible—not a living creature appeared in the place. "It doesn't look very inviting, my dear," said Mrs. Crayford. "I am at your service, however. What do you say?"

She offered her arm to Clara as she spoke. Clara refused it. She took Crayford's arm, and clung to him.

"I'm frightened, dreadfully frightened!" she said to him, faintly. "*You* keep with me—a woman is no protection; I want to be with *you*." She looked round again at the boat-house doorway. "Oh!" she whispered, "I'm cold all over—I'm frozen with fear of this place. Come into the yard! Come into the yard!"

"Leave her to me," said Crayford to his wife. "I will call you, if she doesn't get better in the open air."

He took her out at once, and closed the yard door behind them.

"Mr. Steventon, do you understand this?"

asked Mrs. Crayford. "What can she possibly be frightened of?"

She put the question, still looking mechanically at the door by which her husband and Clara had gone out. Receiving no reply, she glanced round at Steventon. He was standing on the opposite side of the luncheon-table, with his eyes fixed attentively on the view from the main doorway of the boat-house. Mrs. Crayford looked where Steventon was looking. This time there was something visible. She saw the shadow of a human figure projected on the stretch of smooth yellow sand in front of the boat-house.

In a moment more the figure appeared. A man came slowly into view, and stopped on the threshold of the door.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE man was a sinister and terrible object to look at. His eyes glared like the eyes of a wild animal; his head was bare; his long gray hair was torn and tangled; his miserable garments hung about him in rags. He stood in the doorway, a speechless figure of misery and want, staring at the well-spread table like a hungry dog.

Steventon spoke to him.

"Who are you?"

He answered, in a hoarse, hollow voice,

"A starving man."

He advanced a few steps, slowly and painfully, as if he were sinking under fatigue.

"Throw me some bones from the table," he said. "Give me my share along with the dogs."

There was madness as well as hunger in his eyes while he spoke those words. Steventon placed Mrs. Crayford behind him, so that he might be easily able to protect her in case of need, and beckoned to two sailors who were passing the door of the boat-house at the time.

"Give the man some bread and meat," he said, "and wait near him."

The outcast seized on the bread and meat with lean, long-nailed hands that looked like claws. After his first mouthful of the food, he stopped, considered vacantly with himself, and broke the bread and meat into two portions. One portion he put into an old canvas wallet that hung over his shoulder; the other he devoured voraciously. Steventon questioned him.

"Where do you come from?"

"From the sea."

"Wrecked?"

"Yes."

Steventon turned to Mrs. Crayford.

"There may be some truth in the poor wretch's story," he said. "I heard something of a strange boat having been cast on the beach thirty or forty miles higher up the coast. When were you wrecked, my man?"

The starving creature looked up from his food, and made an effort to collect his thoughts—to exert his memory. It was not to be done. He

gave up the attempt in despair. His language, when he spoke, was as wild as his looks.

“I can’t tell you,” he said. “I can’t get the wash of the sea out of my ears. I can’t get the shining stars all night, and the burning sun all day, out of my brain. When was I wrecked? When was I first adrift in the boat? When did I get the tiller in my hand and fight against hunger and sleep? When did the gnawing in my breast, and the burning in my head, first begin? I have lost all reckoning of it. I can’t think; I can’t sleep; I can’t get the wash of the sea out of my ears. What are you baiting me with questions for? Let me eat!”

Even the sailors pitied him. The sailors asked leave of their officer to add a little drink to his meal.

“We’ve got a drop of grog with us, sir, in a bottle. May we give it to him?”

“Certainly!”

He took the bottle fiercely, as he had taken the food, drank a little, stopped, and considered with himself again. He held up the bottle to the light, and, marking how much liquor it contained, carefully drank half of it only. This done, he put the bottle in his wallet along with the food.

“Are you saving it up for another time?” said Steventon.

“I’m saving it up,” the man answered. “Never mind what for. That’s my secret.”

He looked round the boat-house as he made

that reply, and noticed Mrs. Crayford for the first time.

“A woman among you!” he said. “Is she English? Is she young? Let me look closer at her.”

He advanced a few steps toward the table.

“Don’t be afraid, Mrs. Crayford,” said Steventon.

“I am not afraid,” Mrs. Crayford replied. “He frightened me at first—he interests me now. Let him speak to me if he wishes it!”

He never spoke. He stood, in dead silence, looking long and anxiously at the beautiful Englishwoman.

“Well?” said Steventon.

He shook his head sadly, and drew back again with a heavy sigh.

“No!” he said to himself, “that’s not *her* face. No! not found yet.”

Mrs. Crayford’s interest was strongly excited. She ventured to speak to him.

“Who is it you want to find?” she asked. “Your wife?”

He shook his head again.

“Who, then? What is she like?”

He answered that question in words. His hoarse, hollow voice softened, little by little, into sorrowful and gentle tones.

“Young,” he said; “with a fair, sad face—with kind, tender eyes—with a soft, clear voice. Young and loving and merciful. I keep her face in my mind, though I can keep nothing else. I must wander, wander, wander—restless, sleep-

less, homeless—till I find *her*! Over the ice and over the snow; tossing on the sea, tramping over the land; awake all night, awake all day; wander, wander, wander, till I find *her*!”

He waved his hand with a gesture of farewell, and turned wearily to go out.

At the same moment Crayford opened the yard door.

“I think you had better come to Clara,” he began, and checked himself, noticing the stranger. “Who is that?”

The shipwrecked man, hearing another voice in the room, looked round slowly over his shoulder. Struck by his appearance, Crayford advanced a little nearer to him. Mrs. Crayford spoke to her husband as he passed her.

“It’s only a poor, mad creature, William,” she whispered—“shipwrecked and starving.”

“Mad?” Crayford repeated, approaching nearer and nearer to the man. “Am *I* in my right senses?” He suddenly sprang on the out-cast, and seized him by the throat. “Richard Wardour!” he cried, in a voice of fury. “Alive!—alive, to answer for Frank!”

The man struggled. Crayford held him.

“Where is Frank?” he said. “You villain, where is Frank?”

The man resisted no longer. He repeated vacantly,

“Villain? and where is Frank?”

As the name escaped his lips, Clara appeared at the open yard door, and hurried into the room.

“I heard Richard’s name!” she said. “I heard Frank’s name! What does it mean?”

At the sound of her voice the outcast renewed the struggle to free himself, with a sudden frenzy of strength which Crayford was not able to resist. He broke away before the sailors could come to their officer’s assistance. Half-way down the length of the room he and Clara met one another face to face. A new light sparkled in the poor wretch’s eyes; a cry of recognition burst from his lips. He flung one hand up wildly in the air. “Found!” he shouted, and rushed out to the beach before any of the men present could stop him.

Mrs. Crayford put her arms round Clara and held her up. She had not made a movement: she had not spoken a word. The sight of Wardour’s face had petrified her.

The minutes passed, and there rose a sudden burst of cheering from the sailors on the beach, near the spot where the fishermen’s boats were drawn up. Every man left his work. Every man waved his cap in the air. The passengers, near at hand, caught the infection of enthusiasm, and joined the crew. A moment more, and Richard Wardour appeared again in the doorway, carrying a man in his arms. He staggered, breathless with the effort that he was making, to the place where Clara stood, held up in Mrs. Crayford’s arms.

“Saved, Clara!” he cried. “Saved for *you*!”

He released the man, and placed him in Clara’s arms.

Frank! foot-sore and weary—but living—saved; saved for *her*.

“Now, Clara!” cried Mrs. Crayford, “which of us is right? I who believed in the mercy of God? or you who believed in a dream?”

She never answered; she clung to Frank in speechless ecstasy. She never even looked at the man who had preserved him, in the first absorbing joy of seeing Frank alive. Step by step, slower and slower, Richard Wardour drew back, and left them by themselves.

“I may rest now,” he said, faintly. “I may sleep at last. The task is done. The struggle is over.”

His last reserves of strength had been given to Frank. He stopped—he staggered—his hands waved feebly in search of support. But for one faithful friend he would have fallen. Crayford caught him. Crayford laid his old comrade gently on some sails strewn in a corner, and pillowed Wardour’s weary head on his own bosom. The tears streamed over his face. “Richard! dear Richard!” he said. “Remember—and forgive me.”

Richard neither heeded nor heard him. His dim eyes still looked across the room at Clara and Frank.

“I have made *her* happy!” he murmured. “I may lay down my weary head now on the mother earth that hushes all her children to rest at last. Sink, heart! sink, sink to rest! Oh, look at them!” he said to Crayford, with a burst of grief. “They have forgotten *me* already.”

It was true! The interest was all with the two lovers. Frank was young and handsome and popular. Officers, passengers, and sailors, they all crowded round Frank. They all forgot the martyred man who had saved him—the man who was dying in Crayford's arms.

Crayford tried once more to attract his attention—to win his recognition while there was yet time. "Richard, speak to me! Speak to your old friend!"

He look round; he vacantly repeated Crayford's last word.

"Friend?" he said. "My eyes are dim, friend—my mind is dull. I have lost all memories but the memory of *her*. Dead thoughts—all dead thoughts but that one! And yet you look at me kindly! Why has your face gone down with the wreck of all the rest?"

He paused; his face changed; his thoughts drifted back from present to past; he looked at Crayford vacantly, lost in the terrible remembrances that were rising in him, as the shadows rise with the coming night.

"Hark ye, friend," he whispered. "Never let Frank know it. There was a time when the fiend within me hungered for his life. I had my hands on the boat. I heard the voice of the Tempter speaking to me: Launch it, and leave him to die! I waited with my hands on the boat, and my eyes on the place where he slept. 'Leave him! leave him!' the voice whispered. 'Love him!' the lad's voice answered, moaning and murmuring in his sleep. 'Love him, Clara,

for helping *me!* I heard the morning wind come up in the silence over the great deep. Far and near, I heard the groaning of the floating ice; floating, floating to the clear water and the balmy air. And the wicked Voice floated away with it—away, away, away forever! ‘Love him! love him, Clara, for helping *me!*’ No wind could float that away! ‘Love him, Clara—’ ”

His voice sank into silence; his head dropped on Crayford’s breast. Frank saw it. Frank struggled up on his bleeding feet and parted the friendly throng round him. Frank had not forgotten the man who had saved him.

“Let me go to him!” he cried. “I must and will go to him! Clara, come with me.”

Clara and Steventon supported him between them. He fell on his knees at Wardour’s side; he put his hand on Wardour’s bosom.

“Richard!”

The weary eyes opened again. The sinking voice was heard feebly once more.

“Ah! poor Frank. I didn’t forget you, Frank, when I came here to beg. I remembered you lying down outside in the shadow of the boats. I saved you your share of the food and drink. Too weak to get at it now! A little rest, Frank! I shall soon be strong enough to carry you down to the ship.”

The end was near. They all saw it now. The men reverently uncovered their heads in the presence of Death. In an agony of despair, Frank appealed to the friends round him.

“Get something to strengthen him, for God’s sake! Oh, men! men! I should never have been here but for him! He has given all his strength to my weakness; and now, see how strong *I* am, and how weak *he* is! Clara, I held by his arm all over the ice and snow. *He* kept watch when I was senseless in the open boat. *His* hand dragged me out of the waves when we were wrecked. Speak to him, Clara! speak to him!” His voice failed him, and his head dropped on Wardour’s breast.

She spoke, as well as her tears would let her.

“Richard, have you forgotten me?”

He rallied at the sound of that beloved voice. He looked up at her as she knelt at his head.

“Forgotten you?” Still looking at her, he lifted his hand with an effort, and laid it on Frank. “Should I have been strong enough to save *him*, if I could have forgotten *you*?” He waited a moment and turned his face feebly toward Crayford. “Stay!” he said. “Some one was here and spoke to me.” A faint light of recognition glimmered in his eyes. “Ah, Crayford! I recollect now. Dear Crayford! come nearer! My mind clears, but my eyes grow dim. You will remember me kindly for Frank’s sake? Poor Frank! why does he hide his face? Is he crying? Nearer, Clara—I want to look my last at *you*. My sister, Clara! Kiss me, sister, kiss me before I die!”

She stooped and kissed his forehead. A faint smile trembled on his lips. It passed away;

and stillness possessed the face—the stillness of Death.

Crayford's voice was heard in the silence.

“The loss is ours,” he said. “The gain is his. He has won the greatest of all conquests—the conquest of himself. And he has died in the moment of victory. Not one of us here but may live to envy *his* glorious death.”

The distant report of a gun came from the ship in the offing, and signaled the return to England and to home.

END OF “THE FROZEN DEEP.”

END OF VOLUME FOUR.



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