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TREASON AT HOME.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

M R S . G R E E N O U G H .

VOL. III.

London :

T. CAUTLEY NEWBY, PUBLISHER,
30, WELBECK STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE,

1865.

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TREASON AT HOME.

CHAPTER I.

THE theatricals were over. The old grey house resumed its wonted quiet, and again Lady Tremyss sat in the low, dark drawing-room, binding over her embroidery frame; silent, inscrutable, self-contained. Although Walter's presence at the Park was no longer necessitated by his office, the habit of going there still remained. Many motives conspired to draw him thither; chief among them, two widely dissimilar. Isabel was now to him, as we have said, the connecting link with Edith;

she kept him informed of all that passed around her; she would talk to him of her by the hour together, for Isabel's was not one of those narrow natures which can afford place but to one strong affection at a time. She was never weary of praising Edith to Walter, and Walter was never weary of hearing Edith praised. It brought its own sharp pang with it, as when we listen to the eulogy of the dead who were dear to us, but yet the words were sweet, and he was content to accept the pain.

Another motive was his desire to watch Lady Tremyss. The mystery of the engravings was yet to be elucidated, her recognition of the ring, her disturbed slumber, and repetition of the name of the person who had last held the jewel; all these, with their sinister background of the uncertainty resting over the circumstances of Sir Ralph's death, combined to fasten Walter's watchful attention upon the mistress of Ilton Park.

Shortly after the theatricals he bethought him-

self of writing to Jack Taunton, an embryo lawyer and former college companion, asking him to hunt up Mrs. Williams.

By return of post he received a letter from that gentleman, accepting the office of amateur detective, and promising to keep him informed of his progress.

On the evening of the day on which he had received this letter young Arden rode over to the Park, taking with him a book of Mrs. Arden's for Isabel. He found Lady Tremyss alone. She was seated near the fire, its light struck upward on her face, imparting unnatural depth to her long black eyes, and bringing into strong relief the delicate outline of her features. It recalled to Walter the evening he had seen her stand warming her slender hands, and rejoicing, with that strange smile, in the bitter cold without. He stood with his back to the mantel-piece, and fixed his eyes upon her face. She sat apparently unconscious of his scrutiny; but as he looked, her face hardened

into stone, her eyes glittered with the superficial lustre of black enamel, her very breath seemed petrified. Walter's glance turned upon her hands, loaded with jewels, one of them an antique intaglio of cornelian.

"Excuse me, but may I ask to see that curious ring?" he said.

She silently detached it from her finger and gave it to him. He examined it carefully, then returned it.

"It put me in mind of the Daubenay stone; did the likeness ever strike you?"

She looked up calmly.

"I do not know the stone. I never saw it."

Not a muscle of her countenance moved.

"You know the name, doubtless," he added carelessly.

"I never heard it before. They cannot live in this part of the country, I think."

Walter was staggered.

Lady Tremyss' face had resumed its ordinary expression as she spoke. The stony, repellent

look had vanished. It was obviously not in that direction that she desired to evade enquiry. However, he would go on, perhaps he might get at something.

“No, the family seat is in Lancashire. It is a very fine place.”

“Indeed; I have heard that shire is not remarkable for beautiful seats.”

“Then you have not been in it?”

“Never.”

Still the same unembarrassed calmness, the same unconscious look.

At this moment Isabel entered. Her mother looked up from her occupation of re-arranging her rings.

“Ah, Isabel, here is Mr. Arden.” She smiled at the young man, as Isabel advanced and extended her hand to him.

“I have brought the book you asked for,” said Walter to Isabel, turning from Lady Tremyss. He put into her hand a small volume.

“What is it?” asked Lady Tremyss.

Isabel gave her mother the book, and bending over her, read aloud,—

“Observations sur les différences produites par la civilisation chez les races indigènes des deux hémisphères.”

“Oh, I shall like to read that, I am sure,” she exclaimed. “Do you know that nothing interests me so much as reading about savages. I have studied so much about them. I really think I know more of them than of my own people. Sometimes I feel almost as if I were a savage myself.”

There was a peculiar narrowing of her eyes as she spoke, a furtive glance that Walter had never seen before. It affected him disagreeably.

“Don’t look so, Isabel,” he said hastily.

“How?” she asked.

“You looked as if you really felt what you said.”

“I did,” she answered, gravely, seating herself by her mother. Lady Tremyss had opened the book, and was turning over its pages.

“Please read me a little bit, Mamma, anywhere, just on this page. I want to see what the style is like—just a few words, you know.”

“Pray do so,” urged Walter.

Lady Tremyss read the passage to which Isabel had pointed.

“L'on a souvent répété que la perfidie et la cruauté sont, chez ces tribus, des qualités innées ; mais l'on se trompe. Si c'en était ainsi, on verra ces sauvages trahir leurs amis, dévaliser leurs proches, et s'acharner sur ceux de la même tribu qui ne seraient pas à même de se défendre ; mais, tant s'en faut, leur dévouement envers ceux aux quels ils ont voué l'amitié ne connaît pas de bornes. Malheur à l'homme qui offense celui à qui l'Indien a dit, ‘mon ami !’ Il le traque comme un chien braqué à la chasse ; il poursuit sa piste à travers ces plaines fertiles, ces prairies verdoyantes, ces landes stériles ; patient, infatigable, impitoyable. Il ne le quitte que lorsque l'expiation est accomplie, lorsque la vengeance s'est rassasiée. Alors le peau rouge

se redresse, il lève vers le ciel sa main ensanglantée, il parle, Ecoute, mon ami, souris, sois content. Je t'ai vengé.”

Lady Tremyss had read the passage in her customary clear and quiet tones, her face remained impassive throughout; but as she raised her eyes in reply to Walter's thanks, he descried within their dark recesses a look of such vengeful exultation, such inhuman triumph, that, brave though he was, the words were frozen on his lips.

—Who, what, was this woman? What was the mystery that shrouded her? What shadow was it that veiled her past from even her daughter's ken? He would discover. He would reach out his hand and seek to draw aside that veil.—

“It is a true pleasure to hear you read,” he said. “Your accent is that of a native. May I inquire where you learnt the language?”

“In a French convent,” she replied, coldly; then rising, she went to her embroidery frame at the other side of the room, seated herself, and began to work.

“You must not ask her any such questions,” said Isabel, in a low, anxious tone. “She doesn’t like them.” Then in a louder key she continued, “But who is the author of this book? I forgot to look.”

“A very distinguished man, the Abbé Hulot. I saw him for a moment at Mr. Hungerford’s.”

“How does he look? I like to form an idea of the author whose works I am reading.”

Walter turned over the first pages, and displayed to Isabel an engraving of the Abbé Hulot’s head.

“What a strongly marked face; how very striking,” remarked Isabel, examining it with curiosity. “Mamma, pray look here.”

She laid the book on the tapestry frame before her mother.

“I see. Take it away,” said Lady Tremyss.

The words came in a low, guttural tone. Walter, looking at her, saw a convulsive shiver run through her frame.

Isabel appeared to have noticed nothing, but

replaced the book on the table with an absent air, as if her interest in it had given way before some pre-occupation.

“I have been thinking all to-day of a letter,” she said, addressing Walter, as she resumed her seat, “a very drolly written letter that my maid received this morning from Edith’s. It says that Edith is immensely admired at Albansea, and that she might have had un très bon parti, for that a young milor Prideaux—I can’t imagine who he can be—jeune homme assez instruit a ce que l’on dit, mais sans tournure—as she describes him, was éperdument in love with her; and that one day they were brouillés and milor went off the next morning. Edith never wrote me a word about it, but that of course she wouldn’t do. I wonder who he is—Prideaux.”

“Prideaux,” repeated Walter, seeing that Isabel expected an answer. “Is not that meant for Prudhoe, Lord Prudhoe?”

“That’s it,” exclaimed Isabel, “of course it’s Lord Prudhoe. How strange!”

“Why strange?”

“No it isn’t, after all. It was only the coincidence—Lord Prudhoe inherited the Tremyss property, you know,” she added in a lower voice. “But I must tell you the rest of the letter. The most interesting part is to come. She says that Mr. Averil is paying her a great deal of attention, and that Edith seems to like him better than anyone there. I am so glad she is enjoying herself, but I am a little surprised that she should like Mr. Averil. You must feel astonished at my knowing all this,” she continued with a smile; “but the letter was more that half French, and what English there was in it, was so strangely spelt that Melvil could not make it out, so I had to read it to her. But please tell me what sort of person is Mr. Averil? I have only seen him, I never spoke to him.”

“He is a man of fortune and position,” replied Walter.

“That is not what I mean; you know him, don’t you?”

“Slightly.”

“Then tell me, do you think he is the right sort of man to make Edith happy?”

Lady Tremyss came to relieve Walter from the rack of Isabel’s questioning.

“My dear, you are asking questions which it is quite impossible Mr. Arden can answer. Miss Arden herself is the only person capable of deciding.”

“I don’t like what I have heard of him,” said Isabel, with a dubious air. “I cannot think she will marry him.”

“Do not make up your mind hastily, my dear. The match would suit Mr. John Arden. He would never permit his daughter to marry any man who could not secure to her a brilliant position.”

“Oh, Mamma, you don’t think that Edith would marry for anything except love,” exclaimed Isabel, earnestly.

“I think she will marry according to her father’s wishes. Hers is a character in which

filial devotion plays a large rôle, do you not think so, Mr. Arden?"

"I believe so,—yes,—certainly," stammered Walter, who, as Lady Tremyss spoke, had been rapidly retracing the various phases of his intercourse with Edith, and concluding that some discovery of her father's intentions had been the cause of her sudden coldness and reserve.

"Then you think that if her father wished her to marry Mr. Averil, she would, whether she loved him or not?" returned Isabel regretfully.

"I am inclined to think she would," replied Lady Tremyss. "And from what Mrs. Lacy said yesterday, I fancy that Mr. Averil's intentions are not at all doubtful."

"What did she say?" enquired Isabel eagerly. "You told me nothing about it."

"Perhaps Mr. Arden will not care to hear Mrs. Lacy's *bavardage*," she answered.

"Oh, I am sure it will interest him as much as it will me," said Isabel. "Won't it, Walter?"

Young Arden bowed assent.

“Very well, do not blame me for gossiping when I repeat that Lady Melby, who is staying at Albansea, seems to consider the engagement quite in the light of a *fait accompli*.”

“I can’t feel glad,” said Isabel, sighing. “He looks so cold and heartless, and then he is twice as old as she is.”

“I have often told you, Isabel, that you are too exalted in your ideas,” returned Lady Tremyss in a tone of gentle reproach. “Miss Arden will gain position and rank, and gratify her father’s ambition ; so console yourself, and begin to think what your wedding gift shall be,” she added caressingly. And Lady Tremyss led away the conversation from Edith, and sustained its chief weight until Walter took his leave.

When the door had closed upon Isabel for the night, her mother rose and glided, cat-like, towards the little book. She opened it and gazed at the mild, venerable face. As she did so her

features assumed an expression of malignant hatred.

“The same,” she muttered. “Thief, jailor,—
the same.”

CHAPTER II.

IN the first shock of the discovery of the probability of Edith's engagement to Ormanby Averil, all Walter's interest in other subjects sank out of sight. He had no time or thought for anything save his own vain and bitter regrets. The stings of jealousy added fresh poison to his grief. It was all that he could endure to know her lost to him ; to think of her as another's was a torture greater than could be borne. He changed rapidly ; he became silent, almost morose. A burning fever consumed him. Strange dreams haunted his slumbers, and made the night dreadful. He spent the day in long, solitary walks and rides, the evening in moody reverie, save when he went

up to the Park, in the hungry hope of hearing something that might put an end to this intolerable suspense. He forgot to watch Lady Tremyss, he remembered no more the suspicions that had risen in his mind relative to her; he only felt that her voice was soft, her greeting gentle, and that before he had been half an hour in her company he was sure to hear something having reference to the one only subject that possessed any interest for him. It was from her that he learnt all the particulars of Mr. Arden's attack, which she had gathered from Mrs. Lacy; and it was she who broke to him with gentle phrase and soothing tact the fact that Averil was the fellow-watcher with Edith in her father's sick room.

“ I fear there is now no doubt of its being a settled affair,” she said in conclusion. “ It is all that her father could wish, but Miss Arden's other friends may be excused for feeling some disappointment. Such a remarkably lovely girl.”

Walter heard it without blenching, feeling that now the worst had come, and that he must rise and meet it like a man. The torture of uncertainty was over. Now, he knew what he had to bear. Now he could be himself again; and the next morning he chatted with his aunt during breakfast time, much to Mrs. Arden's relief; for she had begun to feel afraid that something was the matter with Walter, her apprehensions having vibrated between the possibility of her nephew's being under the influence of the first symptoms of typhoid fever, or of some coolness having arisen between him and Isabel. (Mrs. Arden had drawn what seemed rational conclusions from the frequency of Walter's visits to the Park.) His affection for this one relative and friend flowed forth all the more strongly from his feeling a remorseful consciousness that he had somewhat neglected her of late, a consciousness the keener because unprovoked by any word or look from her. He drew the plan of a new open carriage for her, and in the afternoon read to her

a recently published novel, until he found she had fallen asleep; then ordering his horse, he mounted and rode forth to seek the stern, but kindly bracing of the cold without.

It was a foggy afternoon, verging upon sunset. The wreaths of mist that rose from the neighbouring river came creeping across the wintry fields, borne before the chill breath of a northern wind. The line of the horizon was lost in vaporous twilight, the leafless trees loomed darkly forth from the grayish half-tints hovering around. As Walter rode slowly along, a horseman overtook him, and young Renson's voice exclaimed,

“Ha, Arden, I'm lucky to meet you—cursed disagreeable afternoon. On my word, I believe I was getting blue. One thing is certain, I was immensely tired of my own company. I have felt bored to death ever since I have left off going to the rehearsals, and all that. I wish some one else would get up a play.”

“All theatricals are not so successful as these have been, you must remember,” replied

Walter to Mr. Renson's unusually voluble address. "This was an exception. They are usually complete failures."

"Yes, but that is the fault of the actors, not of the theatricals," answered Mr. Renson. "Mrs. Lacy would wake up an audience of empty easy chairs, and Miss Rosenfield is so pretty that she would have carried it off if she'd left out every word of her part; but as to Miss Hartley, on my soul she goes beyond anything I ever saw. When I was at Paris I spent a good deal of my time at the theatres, and I didn't see anyone to be compared to her. There was something in her voice that got into my throat, it did. I declare, in that last scene I—Good God, what's that!"

Renson fairly blanched, as a tall wreath of mist came gliding by them, its outlines imaging with singular accuracy of imitation those of a sheeted corpse.

"Why, Renson, you don't believe in ghosts!" said Arden, suppressing a smile.

“ And if I did it would be no more than older and wiser men than I have done,” returned Ren-son somewhat sulkily, vexed at an accidental circumstance having revealed a weakness which he did not care to have made known.

“ In old times, yes ; but not now-a-days,” said Walter, who as we have noted, had a singular intolerance for superstition in all shapes.

“ Not so very long ago, either. Sir Ralph was no fool, and he believed in ghosts, and saw them too, for that matter.”

“ What do you mean ?”

“ Just what I say. My man Storrord told me. He saw it.”

“ Saw the ghost ?”

“ No ; but he saw Sir Ralph see it. It was when I sprained my ankle last year, leaping that confounded ditch. I didn't sleep a wink for three nights, and I made Storrord talk to me. He told me all about it.”

“ And what did he tell ?” inquired Walter, who began to feel convinced that the whole neigh-

bourhood was afflicted with an epidemic mania of belief in ghosts.

“ He said that on the day Sir Ralph and Mrs. Hartley were married, they started for a country seat of Sir Ralph’s in the north. It was late when they reached it, and it was a dreary dismal-looking place when they got there. Storrord and the maid were in the rumble outside, and Lady Tremyss and Sir Ralph, with Miss Hartley, inside. Lady Tremyss had refused to allow Miss Hartley to go in any other way. Sir Ralph was in one of his rages, Storrord said, and looked as black as a thunder-cloud; but Lady Tremyss did not seem to mind it. Sir Ralph went to his dressing-room to dress for dinner, and Lady Tremyss took Miss Hartley to the room that had been got ready for her. Storrord saw to his master as usual, and then left the room. He had not got the length of the entry when Sir Ralph’s bell rang furiously. Storrord hurried back and found Sir Ralph standing in the middle of the floor, his face a greyish white, his hair all matted on his

forehead, and his eyes staring at something that he seemed to see standing between himself and the door of the next room. Storrord asked him what was the matter. Sir Ralph asked him in a sort of hoarse whisper if he saw it. Storrord said, 'Saw what?' Sir Ralph did not answer, but stood staring just as he had done before. Storrord got him some brandy out of the travelling case that was in the room. After he had drunk it he began to look more natural, but the next day all the rooms were changed, and Sir Ralph never crossed the threshold of that one again. Now, what do you think of that?'

"I think something was there; but I am not at all sure that it was a ghost," answered Walter, shortly.

"What else could it have been? Storrord couldn't see it. Sir Ralph did."

"Did Sir Ralph ever say what it was?"

"Never, at least not to Storrord."

"Whose ghost did Storrord think it was?"

"He didn't say."

“Did you ask him?”

“Yes; but he only answered that Sir Ralph wasn't a gentleman like other gentlemen.”

And young Renson, who seemed rather to deprecate being out in the mist-haunted twilight, bade Walter good-night, and, setting spurs to his horse, galloped away.

—What ghost—dread offspring of conscience and memory, was it that had come on that wedding evening with its invisible presence to chill the impetuous current leaping within Sir Ralph's stalwart frame? What vision was it that took its silent stand between him and that door, barring it with a viewless horror all too palpable to the bridegroom's terror-stricken sense? What apparition was it that had refused to quit its post, but remained firm rooted before the moving presence of the servant in the room, and had vindicated its right by enforcing Sir Ralph's retreat? —As Walter's thoughts, uninfluenced by those minor details so efficient in confusing our judgment, ran over the outlines of the story of Sir

Ralph's marriage, and brought them beside the air-drawn phantom evoked by his brain, a suspicion, black and horrible, looked in on him from the darkness of the past. He shrank from it with the violent recoil of a healthy moral nature ; he could not look upon it, it was so hideous, so foul, and yet, try as he would, he could not send it back into the nothingness whence it was born. It would not consent to annihilation : it refused to dissolve at his command ; and now it had crept unsummoned towards him and fastened itself upon him, and was whispering in his ear its monstrous story of perfidy, and treachery, and crime.

The first result of the new possibilities which had suggested themselves to young Arden's mind was to singularly complicate his feelings with regard to Lady Tremyss. She appeared to him no longer as an enigma to be solved, a mystery to be elucidated, but a woman who had sustained a wrong of unexampled magnitude, a victim

happily unconscious of the worst feature of her fate, but still a victim to the most atrocious violation of laws, human and divine.

He found, on his return Dr. Jacobs at the Hall, for Mrs. Arden, after suffering from rheumatism, and taking colchicum, according to her own judgment, for several days, had at length been compelled to send for him. He was about to take leave as Walter came in. An idea suggested itself to young Arden as he met him. He followed him downstairs and asked for a moment's conversation in the drawing-room.

Dr. Jacobs established himself comfortably in an easy chair, pushed up his spectacles, and put the points of his fore-fingers together, as it was his practice to do when listening to anything of importance; for the gravity of young Arden's face told him that it was on a matter of moment that his opinion was desired.

“Well, my good young Sir, and what is it?” he asked at length, as Walter seemed to hesitate at opening the conversation.

“I want to tell you something, and to hear how it strikes you.”

And Walter detailed to Dr. Jacobs what young Renson had been saying.

The physician's face clouded as the young man went on. He pursed his lips together as he concluded.

“Now what conclusion do you draw from this?” enquired Walter.

Dr. Jacobs shot a keen glance at the young man.

“The same that I drew at the time.”

“And that is—?”

Dr. Jacobs glanced around, as if to assure himself that the doors were all shut, then bending forward, he said in a half-whisper,

“That there was foul play.”

“And why was nothing said about it?” exclaimed Walter, indignantly.

“Softly, my dear Sir. What use was there in saying anything about it? There were no witnesses to call, no testimony to be brought forward.

The two men were alone together. Sir Ralph said that as Captain Hartley was examining the gun, it went off and shot him. A hundred such cases have occurred. There was not a single accusing circumstance to point to Sir Ralph."

"Then what led you to suspect him?"

"Things that won't bear discussion, trifles incapable of proof. The peculiar distension of the eye, the dry hoarseness of the voice, the clammy feel of the hand, the general aspect of the man. Where everyone else read grief, I saw guilt; but I had no proof save my own moral convictions; and if moral convictions were to hang men, they would turn out very immoral things."

"Then you saw Sir Ralph directly after?"

"I was paying a night call in the village. The messenger saw my chaise, called me down, and I was at the Park in twenty minutes after it happened. Captain Hartley was lying dead in the dining-room where he fell. He looked as if he were asleep, all save that bloody hole over his heart. His wife was holding his

head on her knee, bending so that I could not see her face, and Sir Ralph was leaning against the sideboard. The gun was lying on the floor. Death must have been instantaneous. The gun had obviously been discharged close to him. There was powder on the coat, and it was burnt."

"Did you examine the gun?"

"I could not then. Later I wished to do so; but it had been taken away by that black butler, I believe, and I could not get hold of it. I could prove nothing, so I held my tongue."

"And you said nothing of your suspicions at the inquest?"

"I answered their questions; that was all I had to concern myself with."

There was a certain reticence in the physician's manner which impressed Walter with the feeling that he was keeping something back.

"Because you feared to compromise Sir Ralph?"

"Not only that—"

“ But what ? ”

“ But I did not feel sure about Mrs. Hartley. ”

“ What ! ” exclaimed Walter, aghast.

“ Don't jump at conclusions too hastily. There was nothing about her at that time to awaken suspicion ; but, quiet as she looks, there is a capability of ferocity in that woman's face that leaves one all afloat as to what she may or may not have done. ”

“ But even supposing her capable of it, which I can't admit—what motive could she have had for connivance ? ”

“ The motive for many a crime. Captain Hartley had nothing but his pay ; Sir Ralph was wealthy, could lavish luxuries upon her, gratify her every whim, give her position and influence. There was no lack of motive, supposing she were capable of aiding and abetting the crime. ”

“ But it is too horrible, too unnatural. I can't believe it. ”

“ I do not ask you to do so. I am only telling you why I kept my suspicions to myself. ”

I did not know how large a circle they might make did I divulge them.”

“But there is something in the idea of undetected crime around us, too horrible to be borne.”

“Does it seem so to you? I accept it as a matter of course. I have known wills destroyed, codicils forged, witnesses bribed, murders perpetrated by slander; twice I have known the wrong medicine given by model wives to brutes of husbands—and all this by highly respectable people. Crime lies all around us, though it seldom rises into such gaunt proportions as in the case we are speaking of. I believe the less that is said about it the better. I do not believe in the reformation of criminals; I do believe in the polluting and contagious effect of example. More harm is done to the public imagination by the details of a criminal trial than one can compute. In the lower orders of society, when a human wild beast becomes furious it is best to put an end to him at once; but among educated people there is not that same love of crime for crime’s

sake. Such a man is none the more likely to commit a second offence because he has committed a first one. The restraints of society become stronger the higher we go. I believed that Sir Ralph killed Captain Hartley because he wanted to marry his wife, but I did not believe that he was any the more likely, because of that, to kill anybody else. As to Lady Tremyss, my suspicions have always been much more vague. In fact I cannot say that I suspect her, I can but assert that I think her capable of almost anything."

"But she is so fond of her daughter," objected young Arden, who could in no wise acquiesce in Dr. Jacobs' sweeping denunciation.

"That has nothing to do with it. When I was starting in life I attended the young child of a gipsy woman under sentence of death for murder. The evidence was as plain as day, in fact, she confessed on the scaffold. The child was very young, she was allowed to have it with her in prison. I never saw any devotion equal to that

which that woman exhibited. She tended it with all the care and softness that the most refined lady could have shown. She neither ate, drank, nor slept while it was in danger, and when I told her that it was safe, she burst into tears of joy. The instinctive affections act quite independently of the moral character."

"And what became of the child?"

"I never knew. It was a beautiful little creature. But, as I say, Lady Tremyss is no fonder of her daughter than that gipsy woman was of her child. As to that matter, the fiercest animals are the fondest of their young."

"I cannot see in Lady Tremyss' face what you do. I really think, doctor, that you are riding your theory of physiognomy too far," said Walter, firmly.

"Call it my hobby at once," replied Dr. Jacobs, smiling good-humouredly, as he rose from his chair. "Perhaps I am—perhaps I am; that's the more reason that I should keep silence

on it. All this is in strictest confidence, you know.”

And he departed, leaving Walter strongly inclined to throw aside all his former undefined suspicions of Lady Tremyss ; for like most persons of generous nature, the surest way to obscure his penetration and warp his judgment was to accuse a person, as he deemed, unjustly.

CHAPTER III.

THE next morning brought a letter from Edith to Mrs. Arden, which that lady read three times in the course of the morning, looking more and more anxious after each perusal. It was as follows :—

“ My dear Aunt,

“ Much has happened since I last wrote to you, more than I should have thought could have been crowded into so short a time. I seem to be writing to you from out another world, so strange does all still appear to me.

“ Last Tuesday, papa was taken very ill. He had appeared as well as usual until the time of

the attack, which was sudden and very alarming. I do not think he has had much physical pain; but he seemed much depressed when he regained his senses. He did not talk, but he sighed and groaned at intervals so that it was very distressing to hear him. The physician did not seem to think him very ill the first day, but on the second he appeared much more anxious. What those days were to me, I will not attempt to say. Now he is out of danger. Next week we return home.

“It is to you, my dear Aunt, that I send the first news of my engagement to Mr. Averil. Papa is much pleased. He was very ill at the time, but he rallied at once on being told of it. Mr. Averil is devoted in his attention to him, and aids me in every manner in his power to make the time pass pleasantly to Papa now that he is an invalid and confined to his room.

“Everyone here is as kind as possible. They seem to feel that they cannot do enough for us. Papa has quite a *levée* each day, now that the

doctor allows him to talk. I tell him that he will be quite ruined for everyday life, and that he is getting altogether spoiled. He is in good spirits most of the time, though I sometimes find him looking very dull when he has been a few minutes alone.

“I would write more, but Mr. Averil is waiting for me to go for a drive.

“Adieu, my own kind aunt. Do not forget me. Love me always.

“EDITH.”

Mrs. Arden would have been glad to discuss this letter with Walter; but Walter, after a hasty perusal, had given it back to her, saying that he hoped Edith would be happy, and then had gone out to superintend something on the estate, quite as if it were a matter of no interest at all. So Mrs. Arden was left to her own unaided reflections, and they were not pleasant reflections. The poor little woman felt perplexed, and puzzled, and worried. She was not at ease

about the tone of Edith's letter. To be sure Edith was always reserved, but that didn't account for enough. She didn't say that she was happy, and she didn't seem so, not at all. She didn't appear to care about anything but her father. Filial affection was a very good thing, very good indeed; but it did not seem natural that a girl just engaged should have thought for nothing but her father. And Mr. Averil was so old! To be sure, he would have a title and all that; but then he was so blasé and worn, and Edith so fresh and young. No, Mrs. Arden didn't like it. She wanted something else for Edith. She had a strong conviction that Edith was not doing a wise thing in making this match. Of course, Mr. Arden was pleased. He would have a son-in-law exactly to suit him, such a pushing man as he was. And perhaps it was as well, after all, that Edith should be married before she had time to fall in love with anybody; for if she waited she might form an attachment that her father would disapprove, and that would be still

worse, a great deal worse, for Mr. Arden could be stone and iron where his ambition was concerned, that anyone could see. Yes, she really believed that it was best, after all, for Edith might have had a great deal to suffer if she were to have seen any one she liked, and been disappointed. But it was strange Walter cared so little for it. It didn't seem to interest him at all.

Walter did not come in to lunch; but Mrs. Arden was not left to solitude all the day. Early in the afternoon Mrs. Lacy made her appearance, all in a flutter of joy, and pink feathers, and *application* lace.

“ My dear Mrs. Arden, I am so delighted, so perfectly enchanted, I could not rest until I had come over to see you. The loveliest young creature I ever saw. Ormanby is really captured at last. The very thing I have wanted. I was quite getting into despair about it. I thought he never would marry, but his time is come. Lady Melby writes that he is desperately in love, and that his fiancée shows wonderful tact in treating

him just in the way to keep him so. I am glad she knows how to manage him. It wouldn't do to spoil him, he has had quite too much of that already."

Mrs. Arden enquired in what manner Edith had merited Lady Melby's encomiums on her tact.

"Oh, she says that she is as cold as ice, and as gentle as an angel, and that Ormanby fairly shivers under her reserve. She couldn't do better if she had known him all her life. And from Ormanby's letter I see it is quite as Lady Melby says."

Mrs. Lacy might not unnaturally have committed the indiscretion of showing her brother's letter to Edith's aunt; but that she did not do, although she had it in her pocket at the moment. It ran thus—

“ DEAR ELLEN,

“ Remembering a certain conversation at Houston Lacy not long since, I think myself

justified in believing that you will not regret to learn my engagement to Miss Arden. You have seen her, and can judge whether or not she is likely to fill properly her station in society as my wife.

“ I have not yet broached the subject of our marriage; her father’s health is in too unsettled a state to allow me to do so at present; but I intend the ceremony to take place at the end of a month.

They leave Albansea for Arden Court next week. I shall accompany them, and establish myself in town till the time of the marriage, after which we shall make a tour in Spain. Don’t write to tell me that there are no hotels, nor roads, nor cooks there. I know it already; but, likewise, there are no English there, and all deficiencies of accommodation can be supplied by a travelling fourgon. I will not ruralize in England, nor be stared at on the Rhine. I will have, for a few months, my wife to myself.

“ Adieu. You shall be informed of the date

of the marriage, until then do not expect to hear from me.”

“A cold, heartless, unfeeling wretch,” Mrs. Lacy had impetuously exclaimed, throwing down the letter on the floor of her rose-coloured sitting-room. “I pity that girl; I do from the bottom of my heart. He seems to feel as if he were a vulture carrying off a lamb, and I believe he isn’t much better. Not a word of affection or of consideration for her in it. Poor child!”

And Mrs. Lacy, who was an impulsive good-hearted woman, though circumstances had educated her into being a mass of incongruities and a solid phalanx of faults, began to cry, from a mixture of emotions, dominant among which rose indignation against her brother, and compassion for her brother’s prospective wife, curiously coupled with regrets that her own marriage had not been a love match.

Having thus relieved her feelings, she put on smiles, a black moiré dress and mantle, and a pink

bonnet, and drove over to express the regulation delight to Mrs. Arden.

His sister's simile was not altogether inapplicable. Ormanby Averil's hungry and watchful look, his vigilant attitude in Mr. Arden's sick room, the fiery and unquiet light that now illumined by intervals his once cold and careless eye, seemed more to belong to some social marauder than to a gentleman of enviable position, just engaged, with the universal approbation of society, to a beautiful young girl. For had he arranged every circumstance with an especial view to Edith's success, he could not have been better served by art than he had been by accident. The women,—and it is they who make and unmake in the world,—one and all united in lauding Edith's reputed beauty and grace. Had Averil chosen anyone among their rank and file, they would have unanimously decried the object of his preference, for each aspirant would have felt her own claims to admiration underrated; but he had chosen a girl who had never made her appearance,

and who, consequently, could not be considered in the light of a rival, and each woman was glad to pique other women by magnifying the charms of Ormanby Averil's fiancée. The men were glad to see him so securely *rangé*. His consummate prudence had enabled him to escape unscathed the ordeal of public scrutiny since his first esclandre; but, nevertheless, the men felt that Ormanby Averil was a dangerous fellow, and that it was high time that he had a wife of his own to take care of.

So every day's post brought to him a packet of letters of congratulation, on pink paper, and scented paper, and cream-laid paper, all expressive of admiration of the much-lauded, though as yet unseen charms of Miss Arden, and of the peculiar pleasure each separate writer took in Mr. Averil's good fortune in having secured such a prize.

Averil would run his eye over them and crush them up and throw them in the fire, and then return to the sick room where dwelt his lovely snow statue, and envy the father on whom she

waited with such untiring care. For neither loving look, nor caress, nor smile could Averil win from Edith. She had distinctly told him she had engaged to marry him at her father's wish. She had not professed to love him; and the shudder which ran through her when he pressed the betrothal kiss upon her forehead, had warned him to abstain for the future from any such call upon her endurance. Yet he had nothing to complain of. Her manner never varied from its courtesy. Her ear was always ready when he claimed it, but Averil could not speak to her of his love. There was something in her manner that imposed silence on vows and protestations,—an invisible barrier of still reserve that he dared not attempt to break down. He took the part of devoting himself to Mr. Arden, and so won some rare smiles, some occasional words of gratitude from Edith. He exerted all his powers of conversation for the sick man's benefit, hoping that they might win her admiration; but in the midst of his wittiest allocutions and most graphic recitals,

he would often see her eye veil itself in mist, her face assume an absent expression, and she would lose herself from him in a reverie.

Averil became furiously jealous of those reveries. He had questioned Mr. Arden on their possible bearing, and the banker had replied that Edith, on the day of Averil's proposals, had positively declared that she had no wish to marry anyone else.

“And she is truth itself,” added her father
“If she said so, it is so.”

And Averil resigned himself to jealousy of Edith's inaccessible thoughts, since there was no person on whom to fasten the responsibility of these long, melancholy fits of abstraction.

Once, for one moment, did the idea of restoring her liberty to Edith cross his mind,—one struggle did his better nature make against the overwhelming force of his passion.

Mr. Arden had fallen asleep in his easy chair. Edith had left her place beside him and seated herself on the great old-fashioned window seat.

The moonlight streaming into the chamber rested on her white draped figure, bringing it into startling relief against the surrounding shadows of the room. Averil placed himself as near as he dared to her. She did not turn her head. She was watching the moon, which was wading through clouds that seemed to retire at her approach, making a pathway for her to tread the sky. There was no sound save the beating of the waves without and the measured breathing of the sleeper within. Averil gazed on her in silence. There was something in the chill sanctity of the moonlight falling around her that cooled the rushing fever of his veins. Edith looked in those rays like some sculptured image of a saint, not like a mortal maiden bound by earthly ties. A feeling of reverential compassion rose softly within him, divine inspiration of his better self.

“Edith,” he said, “speak frankly to me, do you wish this marriage?”

She turned her head with a quick, eager

motion, the tremulous eagerness of a prisoned bird that sees the cage door ajar. But the momentary gleam faded, the transitory emotion was checked. Her features quivered for an instant, than sank into their usual sad repose.

“It must be,” she answered. “My father’s life may depend on it.”

The paper which Averil carried in his breast pocket seemed to burn and scorch his flesh. Edith spoke again.

“I do not say that I love you, but I will always obey and honour you—that I can safely promise. I will try to love you;—perhaps some day I shall.”

Innocent, unconscious words, that fell like drops of perfumed oil upon the smouldering furnace of Ormanby Averil’s heart, sending up a cloud of sheeted flame to devour utterly his nascent good intention, his scarce-born better thought.

“Perhaps some day,” to see her come gliding towards him of her own sweet will, to see her

eyes grow glad, her lips smile,—to feel those soft arms thrown around his neck.

Averil's head grew giddy, his breath came fast and faint, he closed his eyes. "Give her up—relinquish such a possibility—what a fool he had been to think of it."

And Edith's only chance of deliverance disappeared between the closing gates of his twice-hardened will.

He had no idea, however, of becoming a common malefactor. He had judged Mr. Arden with that penetration which rarely played him false. He felt assured that he risked nothing in returning to the banker the despatch that he had rescued from the flames. Edith's father would take good care that no disclosure should be made that might induce her to falter in her present convictions. And accordingly he took the opportunity afforded him the next morning by Edith's absence to put the yellowed and discoloured sheet into Mr. Arden's hands.

“Where did this come from?” exclaimed the banker hastily. “I thought I had burnt it.”

“It was on the hearth beside you. I put it away to give it back later.”

“Does anyone know of it?”

“No one.”

“Not even Edith?”

“I have been silent even to her.”

“You did right, quite right. I must beg you on no account to mention the circumstance, especially not to her.”

Mr. John Arden dropped the paper into the fire, and looking up, caught a cold, derisive flicker in Ormanby Averil's eye.

“I am not called on to be more scrupulous than her father,” he thought to himself. “What a confounded blunder I was on the point of making last night.”

His self-accusing reflections were interrupted by Wilson's entrance with newspapers and letters. For these the banker had shown peculiar eager-

ness ever since he had been able to pay any attention to their contents; but he would never allow anyone to open them for him, although Edith usually read aloud to him their contents. He shuffled them hastily, selected one, opened it with trembling hands, threw a glance over the contents, and turned purple. Averil started forward.

“No, no; it’s nothing,” he said, half inarticulately. “All’s right.”

“He shook from head to foot.

“My God!” he muttered, after an interval, passing his hand through his hair, and looking round like a man relieved from a hideous dream.

And Averil knew that the banker had dreaded ruin, and that the danger was past.

“Don’t say anything to Edith of my having been a little moved,” said Mr. Arden, after a new pause. “It might make her uneasy, you know.”

“I have not spoken of Edith’s dowry,” said

Mr. Arden the next day to his intended son-in-law, "and I most highly appreciate the delicacy which has kept you silent on the subject."

Averil bowed in acknowledgment. In fact, his reserve had cost him nothing. He did not care for the girl's money, he only coveted herself.

"It may surprise you to hear that I intend shortly to retire from active business. Such attacks as this of mine should be taken as warnings."

"Not to tempt fortune any longer," mentally commented Averil.

"But such is the position of my affairs that I do not fear to affirm that my daughter will be one of the richest heiresses in Great Britain at my decease."

Averil bowed again, but without any expression of surprise or of pleasure.

"The only thing that remains to be done is to come to an understanding about the settlements. I shall give her four hundred thousand pounds on her wedding-day."

“Excuse me,” interposed Averil firmly, “I intend that you shall give her nothing.”

“But, my dear Sir—”

“Permit me,” proceeded Averil, without allowing himself to be interrupted; “I shall engage to settle upon your daughter ten thousand a year as soon as I come to the earldom, and shall execute a will endowing her with all my present fortune in case of my demise before that time; but I must positively protest against receiving any dowry with her. There must be no further question of it.”

Averil, drawing himself to the full height of his slender but stately figure, walked out of the room, leaving Mr. Arden in a state of stupefaction of astonishment. He had seen a man in his sober senses refuse four hundred thousand pounds!

To this resolution Averil was moved by two strong motives. In the first place, he hoped that such a proof of disinterestedness might influence Edith in his favour; and in the second place, that he had refused four hundred thousand pounds

with her, would give her redoubled *éclat* in society. And to what the world would say, Averil, who led and pretended to despise it, was as sensitive as the merest *débutante*. Had anything been capable of dissuading him from this marriage, it would have been the fear that he might be thought to have been influenced to it by Edith's wealth. Every sentiment, good and bad, within him revolted from the possibility of such an accusation. He had no over great delicacy of feeling, but he had great sensitiveness of pride. That he could be suspected of prostituting his ancient name to a simply venal marriage was an indignity not to be endured. Therefore, though he felt no compunction at forcing himself upon his reluctant idol as her husband, he shrank loathingly from the imputation that any mercenary motive had mingled its inducements with those of his passion. To reject her riches, to refuse her dowry, was a means of extricating himself, simple, easy, and conclusive. And every letter exchanged for the next fortnight among the members of his clique bore on the ex-

traordinary intelligence recently promulgated, that Ormanby Averil, who, although not in the least eccentric, yet never did anything exactly like anyone else, had denied Mr. John Arden the right of giving any wedding portion whatever to his daughter, to the great disappointment of the banker, who wished to give her four hundred thousand pounds.

At the same time a sister rumour was circulated, coming from a widely different but equally reliable source, to the effect that Mr. John Arden had recently doubled his already enormous fortune by some transactions with Greece which, it was whispered among the monied magnates, had looked very insecure a little while before, in consequence of unexpected complications with the fiscal affairs of the Sublime Porte, but whose final success had vindicated Mr. Arden's reputation as the longest-headed man of business in England. But no rumour of this sort reached Edith's well-guarded ear.

The general success of his renunciatory stroke

of policy fully equalled Averil's expectation. But there was one person who did not seem at all affected by it, and that person was one whose good opinion he was peculiarly anxious to secure. Princess Wara smiled when she heard it—smiled an acute, cautious smile.

“Does that surprise you?” she said to Lady Melby. “It does not surprise me at all.”

That evening she accosted Averil, rather an unusual occurrence, for since Edith's arrival she had spoken but little to him, though she had watched him much.

“You have gained your parti,” she said. “I have not congratulated you on your success, but I may do so on your play. It has been admirable, worthy of a Russian.”

Her eyes looked him through as she spoke.—How much did she know?—Averil felt rather uncomfortable.

“I see that you have profited by the answer I made to your question that first day.”

“It would have been a very poor compliment

to your penetration had I not done so," replied Averil, coldly and courteously.

"And yet, had I known the use to which you would put it, I would not have told it you."

"Are you still resolved to be my enemy?" he asked, with a disturbed expression. He was uneasy before that woman, with her abominable, searching, sea-green eyes. Madame Wosocki's eyes did, in fact, look sea-green at that moment.

"It is not as an enemy, it is as a friend," she answered. "I see how it will be."

"What is it that you see? will you not explain yourself?"

She looked fixedly at him.

"This marriage will bring misfortune upon you."

There was a singular tone in her voice, as if she were repeating, not originating the sentence. The sea-green eyes seemed to be looking inward, not outward, the Princess's face had assumed an expression of anxiety, almost of distress. Sharing the deep-rooted traditions of the Sclavic

race, she sincerely took her intuitions for inspirations—the results arrived at by her peculiarly keen perceptive powers for supernatural communications.

“What do you mean to say?” asked Averil, half whispering, as if some invisible being were present.

“I do not know; I cannot tell you what I mean. Only one thing can I tell. We of northern blood can presage and divine, we do not know how; and I tell you again this marriage you so much covet will bring misfortune upon you. I bid you beware.”

She sat silent for a space, paler than usual, apparently oppressed.

“But you will not heed me; you will go on your own way, and if you repent, it will be too late.”

Rising, she moved to where the Prince was sitting alone at some distance, placed herself beside him, and taking his hand, raised it caressingly to her cheek.

“Qu’as tu, donc, mon enfant?” asked the old man, in a tone of quavering sweetness.

She leant towards him and whispered something in his ear. He smiled incredulously.

“It is strange, mon amie, that you should be so clear-sighted for others, and have been so blind for yourself.”

“Silence, Waldemar,” she exclaimed hastily, “my best friend, my father.”

“Yes, petite, your father,” he repeated.

“I have been happy with you. Do not say such things—they pain me.”

She kissed his withered hand.

“Every position has its advantages,” he replied, half jestingly. “If I were but thirty years old, for instance, you would not kiss my hand before the world.”

“Tu es méchant,” said his wife, pinching his finger, “no one can see us save ce beau monsieur là, and he is not thinking of us at all.”

It was true. Ormanby Averil had other subjects to occupy his thoughts just then.—The need

of believing is as strong an instinct as the need of loving; perhaps, indeed, stronger. Most sceptics believe in omens, most atheists in signs and portents. Rejecting the one great and all-sufficient object of faith, they are compelled to bestow its superfluity elsewhere. The revival of faith in old juggleries, palmistry, astrology, magic, and the like; and the advent of their more recent rivals, mesmerism, magnetism, the odic force, and spiritualism; are all in an exact inverse ratio with the diminution of religious faith. Mankind must believe in something: if we reject Jehovah, we must perforce fall down and worship the calf;—and obeying the propulsion of his egotistic scepticism, Ormanby Averil's imagination was peculiarly open to be acted upon by any such appeal as that just made to it. The ever-pursuing consciousness of wrong-doing, the inconvenient and obtrusive voice of that conscience which he had never yet succeeded in wholly strangling, invested the Russian's words with their consenting authority.

Vague memories of supernatural denunciations against those who deceive and fraudulently conspire against the innocent and harm the sinless rose ominously within his mind with a strange and sinister murmur. A dread—new inexplicable—closed in around him. The belief in God arose from beneath the heaped-up ruins of his early faith—stern, reproachful, condemning.

For a moment he shrank before it; then, with a sudden and abrupt revulsion, his second self returned, mocking, hard, and triumphant upon him.

—He had lived without God comfortably enough—was he to allow any old-womanish scruples to come now to unman him? Had he been so weak as to be moved by the Russian's maundering? What was it that had shuffled away his habitual self, and sent such a senseless, idiotic lunatic in its stead? He would never speak to Madame Wosocki again. He would go upstairs and look at Edith. He was glad they were

going the next day.—He believed the devil was in that woman.—

And Averil stalked out of the room, and going upstairs, extracted from Mr. Arden, whom he found alone, a promise that he would obtain Edith's consent to be married in three weeks from that day.

CHAPTER IV.

THE next week brought no letter from Edith to her aunt; but in its place came an epistle from Mr. John Arden, a wordy and inflated production, wherein the banker, after much open laudation of Averil, and much implied commendation of himself, acquainted Mrs. Arden that his daughter's marriage was fixed for the twenty-second. The epistle concluded with an invitation to the wedding for herself and Walter.

Great was Mrs. Arden's dismay when her nephew stated that he regretted not being able to accept the invitation; but that he had an engagement with Jack Taunton to go somewhere to hunt, which would render it impossible for him

to be present at the ceremony. She remonstrated in vain. For the first time in his life Walter showed unmistakable signs of obstinacy. He would give no reasons; he declined to enter into conversation on the subject; he would not even say where he was going; and he could not be made to see the breach of propriety involved in his remaining absent from Edith's wedding. His aunt was at length reluctantly compelled to give up further discussion of the point, and to unwillingly acquiesce in his decision.

Lady Tremyss, when informed of Walter's intention, had consoled her to the best of her power, by saying that young men never liked weddings, and that it was quite natural that hunting should have the preference in Walter's mind. She had proposed that they should go up together, which invitation Mrs. Arden had gladly accepted; and had taken her leave, saying that Isabel was coming over the next day to show her wedding present for Edith.

Accordingly Walter, on returning from his

customary ride late the next afternoon, saw a groom in the Tremyss livery leading about two horses with side-saddles, and in the drawing-room he found Lady Tremyss and Isabel.

Mrs. Arden's liking for Isabel had ripened into affection since Edith's departure. She now sat comfortably leaning back in her easy chair, her hand resting on Isabel's waving brown hair, from time to time gently caressing it, whilst she conversed with Lady Tremyss on the pitiable helplessness and general incompetency of a certain Mrs. Todd, a pensioner, whom all Mrs. Arden's benefactions could not keep tidy or contented.

Isabel sat meantime straining her ear to catch the sound of Walter's return. She looked hastily down as he entered.

Graver, older than his former self, young Arden seemed now. There was that indescribable air of authority about him, given only by the habit of holding pain in subjection ; but nothing hard or stern mingled with it.

Isabel's lashes drooped anew after her glance

upward, as he spoke to her. She rarely looked him in the face now, she whose eye used to be so frank and fearless. Her words were low and brief when she answered him; they had lost the gay, petulant vivacity of other days. Her attitude was that of timid reserve—she, the spoilt beauty, felt herself so humble before the man she loved.

Was Isabel mistaken, or had in fact Walter's tone become of late more friendly than she had ever known it before? Did he now meet Lady Tremyss with greater warmth? What might these signs betoken?—Unconscious of the searing words which had so lately fallen on young Arden's ear, rousing all that was chivalrous within him in unscrutinizing and blind revolt against their imputations, and driving him into an uncompromising partisanship as the only means of expressing his dissent, Isabel turned away and began to chat with Mrs. Arden with some of her old gaiety.

“Then you really think Edith will like it? I am so glad.”

“I am sure she must; of course she must, my dear. Let me show it to Walter.”

And Mrs. Arden opened a case of crimson velvet, which displayed a bracelet of large stars of pearl set on a broad band of delicate blue enamel.

“Oh no, don't interrupt him now, please; you can show it by-and-by,” objected Isabel, who dreaded to have Walter's attention turned towards her.

“I have been sitting here half-an-hour,” she continued, anxious to distract Mrs. Arden from her intention, “and you have not yet admired my new collar. Isn't it pretty? I've just had a set from London, all like this.”

“I don't know much about such things, you know I never do, my dear; but I did notice that you looked very nice to-day, very nice, indeed; perhaps it was the collar.”

“Certainly it was, and I want to get employment for the person who made it—such a hard case, poor woman. Edith wrote to me about her.

She is very poor, and has been ill and wants work. Won't you order something from her? there's a dear; I know you will."

Mrs. Arden was not hard to entreat on such points.

"If she's poor and wants work, I am willing to encourage her, of course I am; everybody would be; but I don't know what to order. I don't want anything."

"Yes, you do; you want some embroidered caps for the morning. She has made a beauty for mamma, and the same thing, only larger, would do nicely for you."

"Give me the address, and I'll order two; but then, mind, I won't promise to wear them. I'm too old to be putting pretty things on my head," replied Mrs. Arden, who held, in company with many exemplary ladies of mature age, that Heaven is well pleased to see its example in adorning and beautifying ruins, disregarded and set at nought.

"Madame Guillaume, sixteen, Great Windham

Street," said Isabel. "Do you think you can remember it?"

"No, I'm sure I can't, my dear. I could never find place in my mind for any such outlandish name. I didn't know she was a Frenchwoman."

Something of regret mingled with Mrs. Arden's tone, as if she half disapproved of her own good intentions. However, a timely remembrance that it was as disagreeable to a Frenchwoman as to an Englishwoman to starve, suggested itself, and she continued—

"Not but what I am glad to do what I can for her, all the same. What name? say it again, if you please, my dear."

"Madame Guillaume—Mrs. Williams, that is. If it were Mrs. Williams it would be quite an English name, you see."

Walter's ear was caught by the last words of the sentence.

"Excuse me," he said, bending eagerly forward, "did you say Mrs. Williams?"

“Yes, or rather no. I was translating a French name so that Mrs. Arden might remember it. Perhaps you will write it down for her, that will be the safest way.”

Walter drew out his note book, and took down the direction from Isabel’s dictation.

“Why do you want to know about any Mrs. Williams?” asked Mrs. Arden, as he put up the memorandum.

“It is not for myself—it is for another person.”

“Tell us the story, will you not?” said Lady Tremyss. “It has quite a piquant opening.”

Walter hesitated for a moment. The opportunity for testing his former suspicions was tempting, yet he shrank involuntarily from it. What right had he to intrude upon her secrets. Why should those secrets be other than innocent? Who had made him judge or keeper of the beautiful, and as he believed, foully wronged woman, who sat in her black draperies before him, so quiet, so dignified, so imposing? He raised his eyes and looked at her. The glance he

met scattered those compunctious visitings to the winds. Stealthy, watchful, wily, the long, black eyes looked sidelong at him, as looks a snake. All his distrust, all his sense of her craftiness and faithlessness returned anew upon him, while in the background rose a thronging crowd of possibilities, vague, formless and ominous.—No, he would probe this embodied mystery, he would track it as a hunter tracks a wild beast to its lair.—Walter's face hardened, and his tone grew cold and stern.

“It is a strange enough story. A valuable jewel has been lost by the Daubenays, or perhaps stolen from them. The ring was a peculiar one, an orange coloured diamond supported by two eagles' heads.” The long, black eyes gave forth a sudden gleam. “It was the original of the sketch you saw. It has been traced to the hands of a Mrs. Williams—”

Walter paused.

“And that Mrs. Williams is not to be found, I gather from your question to Isabel,” said Lady

Tremyss, turning carelessly away. "Pity that the name is so common. You will find it but a hopeless task, I fear."

"I beg your pardon," answered Walter, unguardedly. "We have traced her to number thirty-five, Chadlink Street."

He had no sooner spoken the words than a sense of their imprudence rushed over him. He would have given a thousand pounds to recall them.

"Ah then, the persistent advertisement in the 'Times' has reference to the same person."

"It has."

"I wish you all success," she said, with an inscrutable smile, as she rose. "Come, Isabel, it is time we were turning homeward."

"My dear, don't forget your bracelet," said Mrs. Arden, holding it out as Isabel bade her good-bye.

"No, that would be very inconvenient, as it must go back to London for some alterations," said Lady Tremyss.

“Why, Mamma, you did not tell me so,” exclaimed Isabel. “I thought it was all right.”

“Not exactly. I think I may be obliged to take it up myself. Look, Mr. Arden, would not a diamond in the centre of each star make it much handsomer?”

Lady Tremyss stood discussing the effect of the alteration upon the beauty of the bracelet, as if Mrs. Williams and the Daubenay jewel and all circumstances connected with them had utterly glided from her mind; then, with Isabel, she took her leave.

Walter plunged his hands in his pockets when he returned from putting the visitors on their horses, unconscious himself how icily cold his farewell had been; and going into the library, walked perturbedly up and down. He had had the opportunity he had wished for, and what had come of it? Literally nothing. Lady Tremyss had glanced stealthily at him, and her eyes had flashed at mention of the ring. Her look had revealed a deep and dangerous nature,

had confirmed all those suspicions which he had of late cast aside, but that was all. It told him nothing save that she had some previous knowledge of the ring, and that he knew before. Perhaps it was one of Sir Ralph's secrets that he had entrusted to her ; for although young Arden's former distrust had again assumed ascendancy, it in no wise tended towards belief in the accuracy of Dr. Jacob's estimation of her character—but he did not want conjectures, he wanted certainties, and where and how was he to find them?—

He meditated long. The result of those meditations appeared in the shape of a confidential letter to Taunton, to be despatched by the next morning's mail.

A singular and inexplicable persuasion had recently begun to arise in young Arden's mind, an impression so vague that he could not reason upon it, and yet so positive as to obstinately hold its place,—a belief that Lady Tremyss in some way was his enemy. He could not call up any one

instance in which she had shewn herself hostile to him; her tone was peculiarly gentle, her smile more than usually courteous, when addressed to him; but nevertheless he felt as if some harmful influence breathed from out her, of power to blight and sear.

With that intuition which comes to us all at times, contradicting reason and defying explanation, the conviction now rushed upon him that in the final shattering of his hopes Lady Tremyss had had some share.—And Edith; had she wrecked Edith's happiness also? Edith, who used to love him.—Notwithstanding her tacit rejection, Walter had not swerved from the final persuasion which had dictated his unanswered letter, and Edith had loved him once.—And what was it that Lady Tremyss had sought to compass? She could not have been actuated by dislike of Edith, had she not saved her life at the danger of her own? She professed herself peculiarly his friend. What aim, what motive could she have had?—And again her caressing words, her gentle

looks, her persuasive accents, came back, and with them the image of Isabel, gentle, downcast-eyed, and silent.

“Can it be?”

He sprang from his chair, and paced the room in perturbation.

“It is impossible. It cannot have been that.”

Even as he denied it, the apprehension of the truth crept over him. A thousand signs, unheeded at the time, returned upon his reluctant memory. He threw himself down on a chair by the table, rested his forehead on his hands and groaned aloud.

CHAPTER V.

As Walter came in to lunch from a morning walk on the second day after his despatch to Taunton, the footman in the hall—a new servant—accosted him.

“A person has been here for you, Sir. He said that he would come back in an hour.—What sort of a person, Sir? He was a steady, good-looking man, but pale. I think, Sir, he has had something to do with horses. He looks like it, Sir. He said he'd come a long way to see you, Sir.”

—George—could it be George? What on earth had brought him all the way back from Canada?

In about an hour Walter heard heavy steps

sounding along the hall; the door opened, and George stood upon the threshold.

His former air of listlessness and dejection was gone. A dogged determination was stamped upon his face, drawing deep lines around his mouth, and lowering his eyebrows over his eyes.

He bowed silently, and putting a sealed letter into young Arden's hand, stood with his eyes fixed upon the opposite wall while Walter read it. It contained a few lines from Daubenay, expressive of his regret at George's return.

George appeared to feel no interest in the contents of the letter. As Walter laid it down he turned his eyes upon him, and spoke.

“ I've come to see you. Sir, minding the words you said when you sent me to Captain Daubenay, about when I needed a helping hand. I've come all the way from Canada, Sir; and now I will tell you what I am going to do.”

The man's voice, too, was changed. It had sunk lower, and its tone had no longer any variation. He neither raised nor depressed it.

It was the same at the end of the sentence as it had been at the beginning.

“ I will help you to what is right and fitting, George, as far as I can,” replied young Arden.

“ Yes, Sir. I know that a poor man can trust you, Sir ; that you’re not one of those who think they can ride over them that’s below them, and lie their lives away and make them outcasts and beggars, and all for their own safety to do wickedness in. I know you’re not such as them, Sir ; and so I come to you.”

“ Sit down, George,” said young Arden, glancing at the man’s pale, fixed face. “ Sit down and let us talk together quietly.”

George sat down on a chair beside the door, and put his hat on the floor beside him.

“ You remember, Sir, when I had that fever at Mrs. Dingall’s, you remember I said I had taken port wine, and that it was the same thing Mr. Goliath had given me ? ”

“ Yes ; but you know the apothecary’s assistant owned that he had sent port wine.”

“ He lied, Sir ;” a momentary gleam of fierceness shot from the man’s eyes. “ It was not port wine, it was something that had laudanum in it. I have had the fever again, and the doctor ordered me laudanum, and I took it ; and it was what Mr. Goliath gave me, and what Mrs. Dingall gave me. It made me feel the same, all heavy and stupid, and light-headed at once ; and I saw those same faces that I had seen before, Sir, those same faces came back to me, Sir ;—and now I know what I know.”

“ What do you mean to say ?”

“ I mean to say, Sir, that Mr. Goliath gave me that to drink knowingly, and I mean to say, Sir, that my lady knew about it.”

George folded his arms on his chest, and looked full into Walter’s face.

“ Are you thinking of all the weight of what you assert ? Have you considered all that it implies ?”

“ I have not thought of anything else, Sir, for five weeks. I believe I should have died in

that fever, Sir, if it had not been for the hope of coming home, and having the truth out. She knew it, Sir; as true as there's a bottomless pit, Lady Tremyss knew what was done that night."

Still the same impassive voice, still the same look of dogged determination.

"What ground have you for thinking so? Be careful, weigh every word before you say it."

"I shall be careful, Sir. I shall not say a word that I can't prove; and though I can't say that I heard my lady tell Mr. Goliath to give me that drug, yet I can say what I did see and hear."

"Wait a moment."

And Walter took out pen and paper.

"Yes, Sir. If she does away with me, as it's very like she'll try to, it will be there in black and white. Would it hold good in a court of law, Sir?"

"Not unless you swear to it before a magistrate; but we can think of that afterwards. Now go on."

“It was the day Sir Ralph was drowned, Sir. We were all at dinner in the servants’ hall, and talking together, and one of the maids said it was queer my lady had not learned to manage Sir Ralph any better, and the upper housemaid, who had lived at the Park a long time, told her my lady could wind Sir Ralph round her little finger. The younger maid, who was a saucy girl, said she supposed that meant my lady wanted Sir Ralph to ride Kathleen, for that she had heard her that morning telling him there was no use in keeping such a horse in the stables, for no one dared to ride her, she was so ill-tempered, and Sir Ralph said there was never a horse foaled that he was afraid of, and my lady said that anyone ought to be afraid of such a creature as that, and a great deal more to the same purpose, and the upshot of it was Sir Ralph swore that he would ride Kathleen that very day. The upper housemaid seemed puzzled, and said she couldn’t in no wise understand it, for my lady knew as well as ever anybody

could know anything that the surest way to get Sir Ralph to do a thing was to dare him to do it. And we all agreed that if Kathleen did upset Sir Ralph, my lady would have herself to thank for it. And that was the last meal I ate at Ilton Park. It wasn't three hours after when Mr. Goliath gave me the laudanum, and that night Sir Ralph was drowned, and, what with the shock and the confusion, all that I've been telling you, Sir, went clean out of my head, until it all came back to me in the fever in Canada. I've never seen Ilton Park since; but I'll see it again, Sir. I haven't been beggared and starved, and had my good name lied away for nothing. I'll have my revenge, if I have to follow them underground for it."

And George set his teeth and looked again fixedly at the wall before him.

"But before you can get anyone to listen to you you must first show some reason why Lady Tremyss should have been induced to plot against her husband's life."

“ I don't see that, Sir, if she did it.”

“ You cannot suppose a crime without a motive, it is not possible.”

“ I don't know what motive she had, but there's one person I'd like to question about it.”

“ Who is that ?”

“ It's Sir Ralph's gentleman as was, Sir, Mr. Storrord. He's got the longest head and the stillest tongue that anyone ever had yet. He isn't hard-hearted, neither, as gentlemen's gentlemen are apt to be. He met me just after, while I was hanging about, hiding myself, and trying to get a look at some one as I thought cared for me. He said one or two words to me; there was nothing to take hold of in them, but I saw he did not think harm of me for all their lies. He knew something. I know he did. He meant something when he said it was hard on me. He's with young Squire Renson now. I am going to ask him what he meant.”

Young Arden shaded his face with his hand

and sat silent for a few moments, then he looked up at the man.

“George, I want you to promise me one thing,—I want you to leave this matter in my hands.”

The dogged look which had never left the groom’s face during the interview, deepened into sullen distrust.

“You have been very good to me, Sir. It is not because I forget how much I am obligated to you, but I cannot do that. I am the one as has been wronged next to Sir Ralph. He’s dead, and there’s no righting him ; but I’m alive, and I mean to be righted.”

“I mean you shall be righted. Leave this to me, and I promise you solemnly I will seek redress for you with all my might. I will not rest until this matter is searched out.”

The man moved uneasily on his chair. His breath came short.

“I do believe you, Sir ; but you don’t know how hard it is to give it up out of my hands. I

don't seem like myself, Sir. I've got to love my revenge. I feel as if I should be all empty and weak if it was taken away from me, Sir. It's all that holds me up."

Walter scanned the groom's face. If he was to influence him it would not be done by opposition.

"And how is your revenge to be secured? What do you purpose to do?"

"To let everyone know what they've done, Sir, no matter what comes of it; and the worse, the better. That's what I mean to do."

"Are you aware that if you bring such an accusation against them without more proof than you have adduced, you lay yourself open to an action for slander, with heavy damages, which, in your case, would mean imprisonment."

"Do you mean to say, Sir, that I can't tell what I know?"

"Not in a case like this, unless you can prove it; and what you have just told me is no proof."

George lowered his eyes a moment, as if taking counsel with himself; then he rose, approached the table behind which Walter was sitting, leaned his hands on it, and gazed steadfastly at him.

“Do you believe it, Sir?”

Young Arden did not answer.

“Do you believe that Lady Tremyss had to do with what was done that night?”

There was silence in the room while one might have counted twenty, then Walter answered,

“I do.”

“Will you see justice done?”

“I will, so far as in me lies.”

“I am going, Sir. When you have need of me I shall be at hand.”

“You had better go to London for the present. Send your address here. If you need money I will supply you. Be careful; it mustn't be known where you are.”

George gave the desired assurance, and left the room.

An hour had passed, and still Walter sat in the library meditating on the strange and sinister story that George had told, that story which recalled so singularly all his own former passing misgivings, but clothing them with such dark and monstrous forms as he had never for an instant contemplated. George's recital had compelled young Arden's belief, almost in spite of his reason, for he saw plainly that as yet the accusation rested on insufficient grounds. He had promised to use his best endeavours to see justice done. But in order to do so he must have the whole case distinctly before him, all the circumstances connected with Sir Ralph's demise must be classed one by one. The first thing to consider was the relation of the parties to each other. There was good ground for supposing that Sir Ralph had been accessory to the death of Lady Tremyss' first husband. Goliath had but a few weeks before his master's death received an injury from his hand. Could Goliath have been cognizant of the circumstances attending Captain

Hartley's death? Walter suddenly remembered Doctor Jacobs had stated that when he wished to examine the gun, Goliath had taken it away and he could not get hold of it again. If there had been any proof of guilt to be drawn from the state of the weapon, Goliath would have been aware of it. It might not improbably be assumed that he was aware of his master's guilt. The fidelity of his race would lead him to keep this concealed, unless some stronger motive were brought to bear to induce him to reveal it. The injury he had received might be considered sufficient to have provided that motive. He would scarcely have chosen to denounce his master to the authorities, as by so doing he would implicate himself as a party to the crime after its commission. He would seek some other means, and what would have been so obvious as to betray his master's secret to his master's wife? And she, so cold, so secret, so resolute, so daring, would it not be in accordance with her character to choose a silent and sure revenge, rather than

trust for vengeance to the unsafe chances of a criminal prosecution, which,—end as it might,—would inevitably entail social ruin upon herself and her daughter? She would have every external inducement to preserve Sir Ralph's secret. Her revenge must be close hid. George's testimony as to the art with which she had induced Sir Ralph to mount his most unmanageable horse, the opiate which the butler had administered to him before his setting forth in company with his master, offered strong presumptive evidence of some conspiracy between herself and Goliath. The witness borne by the little boy to the fact of Sir Ralph's having crossed the bridge before being drowned in the river, although at variance with the common belief, was yet in no wise a refutation of the main fact. There was no reason that Kathleen should not plunge into the river from one bank as well as from another. And yet,—as he had thought before,—would any horse be likely, when close to its stables, to turn and rush off in an opposite direction? But Goliath was

there ; if he had given the opiate to the groom to ensure his master's solitary return, he was not watching there with any view to Sir Ralph's safety. Was it not his hand that had turned the furious animal's course towards the river, perhaps that had hurled his master in? But how to prove it?—there was the question. George had said that Storrord might know something. The next thing was to see Storrord. But first he would call Letty in, she had been in service at the Park, perhaps something might come out if she were questioned. Accordingly he rang the bell and ordered Letty to be summoned.

Letty entered her young master's presence with cheeks as red as her arms. What could he possibly want with her? An undefined hope that she was going to hear something about George, made her heart beat quickly as she stood beside the door and dropped her curtsey.

“ Letty, I have been thinking over that affair of George's,” said Walter, “ and I am very desirous of seeing it cleared up.”

Then the young master hadn't heard about him. Poor Letty's heart sank.

"I want to know if you remember whether he had had any ache or pain for which he had taken any medicine on that day when Sir Ralph was drowned?"

"No, Sir, I don't think as he had."

"I suppose if he had, he would have gone to the apothecary's to get it, and so you would have known about it."

"I should have known if he'd had anything the matter with him, Sir, for he'd have told me, sure; but he wouldn't have gone to the 'pothecary's all the same, Sir."

"Why not?"

"Because, Sir, Mrs. Pralyn, the housekeeper, had a medicine chest, and whenever anything was the matter the servants used to go to her, and if what she wanted wasn't in the chest, it was sure to be in Sir Ralph's dressing-room. He kept a closet all full of doctor's stuff, Sir."

"How do you know that?"

“I’ve dusted the bottles many and many a time, Sir.”

Walter pondered a while. He did not want to awaken the girl’s suspicions, and yet it was not easy to go on with his enquiries without doing so. However, he must risk it; fortunately she was not peculiarly sharpwitted.

“Do you know whether Mrs. Pralyn kept any laudanum in her medicine chest?”

“No, Sir, she didn’t,” Letty replied promptly.

“You speak as if you were sure of it,” said Walter, fixing his eyes upon her.

“Yes, Sir; there was something made me remember it particular, if you please, Sir,” said Letty, looking as if she feared Walter might take offence at her presuming to be very sure of anything.

“Really, — well, tell me what it was.”

“It wasn’t nothing, Sir,” said Letty, her voice beginning to falter; and she looked down and played with her apron string.

“Never mind it’s being nothing; tell me,” responded Walter encouragingly.

Letty turned sideways.

“Come, go on,” said Walter, and Letty reluctantly made up her mind to speak, since speak she must.

“It was only that the morning after Sir Ralph was drowned, Sir, and they were all laying it on George because he wasn’t there, and I was in great trouble, Sir, and the cook called me to help her cut bread for the servants’ table, and I was crying so I couldn’t see, Sir, and I cut a great gash on my hand, and it ached very bad, Sir, and the cook sent me to Mrs. Pralyn, and she said it must be bound up with laudanum, but that she hadn’t got any, and she told me to go to Sir Raph’s dressing-room and get some out of the closet, Sir.”

“Well, did it do your hand any good?”

“No, Sir; it wasn’t there.”

“I thought you said it was there?”

“ It was always, Sir. It was in the front row, and it had ‘ Poison ’ on it in big letters, that’s how I remember it, Sir.”

“ And now you say it wasn’t there ? ”

“ It had been taken away, Sir.”

“ How do you know ? Tell me all you know about it,” said Walter hastily.

“ Yes, Sir ; it wasn’t me that took it, Sir,” said Letty, looking a little alarmed.

“ Oh yes, I know, of course it wasn’t ; but tell me all, there’s a good girl, and be quick about it.”

“ I don’t know anything, Sir, except that the bottle always used to be there, and it wasn’t there.”

“ Who had taken it, do you think ? ”

“ I don’t know who had taken it, Sir ; but it was Mr. Goliath as had got it.”

“ How do you know ? ” Walter bent forward.

Letty fidgetted anew with her apron strings.

“ Why, Sir, I couldn’t eat anything that day, and when the rest were at dinner I went and sat

on the servants' staircase, to be by myself. And I heard steps coming along the passage, and I didn't want to be seen, and so I slipped into a closet on the stairs where the brooms and dust-pans were kept, and I saw Mr. Goliath go by, going up-stairs, Sir, with the bottle in his hand."

"How did you know it?"

"Because it looked like it, Sir."

"That was no proof. It might have been twenty other bottles."

"Yes, Sir; but by-and-by my hand ached worse than ever, Sir, and I thought I'd go and get some laudanum for it, now that it was there, and there it was, Sir."

"Had anything been taken out of it?" Walter asked, after a pause of thought.

"Yes, Sir; it wasn't full then, and it was full only a day or two before."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Because it was so full that it was wet round the cork, Sir, and the last time I had dusted that

closet, and it was only a day or two before, Sir, I had taken the cork out to clean the top of the bottle, and it was full, Sir; and I remember it, for Mr. Storrord came in while I was cleaning it, and told me to have a care, for that it was dangerous stuff to meddle with; and I told him I hadn't meddled with it, Sir, and that he could see it was as full as full could be, Sir."

"Very well, Letty," said Walter, after a while, during which Letty had been vainly struggling to make out the scope of his enquiries, "that will do. Don't speak of this to anyone. It seems you are quite sure George had not been ill?" he added, to divert her suspicions from the right channel, in case, which was most improbable, that she had discovered it.

"No, Sir; he never was ill in those days, Sir," replied Letty, with something like a sob.

"Now you may go."

"Thank you, Sir," said Letty, dropping a curtsey, and she turned slowly away. Walter read the disappointment on her face.

“ Stop a moment,” he said. “ You need not say anything about it; but I am in hopes before long to have good news to tell you about George. Now go.”

And Letty, suddenly radiant, returned to the laundry, her wonderings as to what the young master wanted to know so particular about the bottle for, chased for the time by the glad possibilities that clustered about his last assurance.

“ There was something gained,” thought Walter; “ not much in itself, but sufficiently important, taken in connection with other things. Now for Storrord.” And he ordered his horse, refused the attendance of the groom, and leaving word that he should not be back to dinner, rode away to Renson Place. According to his expectation young Renson was out. He requested to see Storrord, and at the end of some two or three minutes the valet made his appearance at the door of the drawing-room. Walter cast a rapid glance over the man’s features. They were clear cut, expressive at once of resolution and of

habitual reticence. The pale cheek, the steady eye, the somewhat compressed nostril and the thin lips, all betokened a man whose confidence was not to be surprised. "Close, wary, politic," was the result of Walter's investigation. Storrord perceived that he was being studied. He looked down.

"Come further into the room. I wish to speak with you, and I do not wish to be overheard," said Walter.

Storrord advanced to the other side of the hearth-rug.

"I want certain information; it is my object to avoid any unnecessary publicity in obtaining it, and so I come to you to supply it privately."

"I am not aware that I possess any information that could be of any interest to any gentleman," replied Storrord, quietly.

"Perhaps you think so at this moment; but you will be better able to judge when I refer to Sir Ralph."

"Sir Ralph was a very good master, Sir, I

have nothing to say against him," answered Storrord, impassively.

"And Lady Tremyss?"

"My lady was always as other ladies are. I have nothing to say about Lady Tremyss, Sir."

Walter looked steadily at him. There was a convulsive twitch of the muscle of the eyebrow as he ended. Though of an intrepid nature, Storrord was a nervous man. That twitch betrayed consciousness. Walter resolved to come at once to the point.

"I will speak openly to you. I have reason for believing that Sir Ralph was instrumental in the death of Captain Hartley."

Had he heard his former master accused of having been instrumental in the death of a woodcock, Storrord could not have looked more unmoved.

"I can't say anything one way or another, Sir. I was not on the spot, and I only came in with the rest of the servants."

"Did you see the gun?"

“ No, Sir ; it was not there.”

“ What had become of it ?”

“ I do not know, Sir.”

“ Did you ever ask ?”

“ No, Sir.”

Storrord's face was like a sealed book. Walter must try to reach his convictions in some other way.

“ What was it that appeared to Sir Ralph on the evening of his wedding day ?”

Storrord changed his weight to the other foot.

“ I do not know, Sir.”

“ You saw him while the vision was before him ?”

“ Yes, Sir.”

“ What did you then suppose it was ?”

“ I never said I supposed it was anything, Sir.”

“ Do you think he fancied it was Captain Hartley ?”

“ Sir Ralph never said, Sir.”

“ Do you think there was anything there ?”

“No, Sir.”

“You do not believe in ghosts?”

“No, Sir.”

“Then what Sir Ralph saw was the result of his imagination.”

“I suppose it was, Sir.”

“You suppose it was, and yet you formed no supposition as to what it was?”

“It was impossible for me to know anything about it, Sir.”

The man's tone was thoroughly impassive; not the slightest interest in the questioning he was undergoing betrayed itself in his expression. He had got the better of his momentary nervousness, he stood like a block of wood. There was something exasperating in his composure.

“Do not forget that I could summon you before a magistrate and demand your deposition.”

“But if I know nothing, Sir.”

“The law has ways of sharpening men's memories.”

“I trust the English law is not such, Sir, as to punish a man for not saying what he does not know.”

He was obviously impervious to fear. Walter must make it for the man's interest to reveal what he knew. He had kept Sir Ralph's secret because it was his interest so to do; his interest must now be enlisted to divulge it.

“I should on many accounts be sorry to be driven to any such expedient. I wish to gain the information I seek in as quiet a manner as possible. I do not hesitate to say that it would be worth fifty pounds to me.”

Storrord's eye dilated an instant. He paused.

“Fifty pounds is a large sum, Sir,” he said, slowly, at length. “I am sorry I cannot earn it.”

There was an almost imperceptible change in his tone.

“Supposing that you knew, should you still refuse to give the information?”

“Possibly, Sir.”

“And why?”

“Because I should be risking a good place, Sir.”

“I do not see how.”

“A gentleman would not wish to keep anyone in his service who had said anything against a former master, Sir.”

“But if he only said the truth.”

“That would make no difference, Sir. Gentlemen stand by one another, right or wrong, against them that are under them, Sir, begging your pardon.”

“Then you think that under the circumstances fifty pounds would not be a satisfactory sum?”

“That is what I think, Sir.”

“What amount would suit you?”

“Supposing that I knew anything, Sir—”

“Yes.”

“I should say one hundred pounds, Sir,” replied Storrord, steadily.

Walter took a cheque from his pocket-book, asked for pen and ink, filled it up, and laid it upon a stand near him.

“And for this sum you engage to tell me all you know about Sir Ralph and Lady Tremyss.”

Storrord looked away from the cheque.

“Not of my lady, Sir. If I knew anything I could not say it.”

“And why not?”

“I could not, Sir.”

“What reason have you for refusing?”

“I should not like to, Sir.”

“What does that mean?”

Walter spoke with a tinge of irritation. He had thought he had overcome the man's resistance, and here it was, as obstinate as ever. The young gentleman's tone piqued Storrord. He raised his eyes.

“I mean I should not dare to, Sir,” he answered, firmly.

“What harm could she do you?”

Storrord glanced around the room, drew a step nearer, and said in a low voice, “I should not think my life worth an hour's purchase, Sir, if Lady Tremyss were my enemy. There's no

money could be offered me, Sir, that would induce me to say one word about my lady."

Walter's representations were of no avail. He could not shake Storrord's settled resolve. He was forced at length to relinquish his fruitless efforts, and content himself with learning what he was willing to say, with regard to Sir Ralph.

"I will tell you all I know, Sir; but it is not much."

"Very well."

"Shall I answer your questions, Sir?"

"No. Go on and tell the story your own way; but first give me your word of honour that you will hold nothing back."

"Yes, Sir, I give my word," said Storrord, deliberately.

"Go on."

"I had been with Sir Ralph a little more than eight months when Captain and Mrs. Hartley came on that visit to the Park. I had got well acquainted with Sir Ralph's usual ways in that time; but from the day he received Captain

Hartley's letter he became different from what he had been. He did not rest a minute. And after they arrived he grew stranger than ever. He was always a dark complexioned man; but he got a red, swarthy look that did not belong to him; and he would sit up till three and four in the morning, long after everyone else had gone to bed, which was not his habit before. The house was all in a whirl with company the whole time, and Sir Ralph seemed to think that nothing was good enough for them. One day Mrs. Hartley said that she would like to see a certain play, and he had play actors down from London, and a stage fitted up, and the ball-room turned into a theatre. She took every thing very quietly.—It was a few days before Captain Hartley's death, I went into the room in the morning, and I was frightened when I saw my master. His eyes were blood-shot, his face was all sodden, and the blood had run down on his chin from his lip where he had bitten it. His bed had not been touched, a chair was lying on the ground as if it

had been thrown across the room. I did not say anything, Sir Ralph never liked to be spoken to, especially when he was in one of his moods. As I was getting the things ready to dress him, he came up and took hold of my shoulder. His fingers felt like steel. 'Is there a devil?' he said. I was convinced then that he was out of his mind; however, I thought the best thing I could do was to answer him as comfortably as I could, so I said that I did not believe in any devil except the evil within us. He did not answer anything, nor speak again while I was dressing him. When he was dressed he looked and appeared the same as usual, and I thought at the time that probably he had been drinking harder than his custom overnight so as to disorder his thoughts the next morning, though Sir Ralph never got overcome with wine as other gentlemen do; his head seemed iron. The next days passed as usual, except that Sir Ralph was more unequal than was common. I would hear him laughing in a loud, reckless way when he was in company,

and when he was alone he was more moody and morose than ever, and his hands grew like burning coals.

“On the morning of the day Captain Hartley died, when I came into the dressing-room I began to arrange the dressing things ready for Sir Ralph to come in, and as I was doing so I saw some shining grains on the carpet. I supposed the housemaid had let some coal dust fall. I took the hearth-brush and swept the grains into the fire. They went off. It was gunpowder. Something put it into my head to go down into the dining-room and look round at the guns and fowling-pieces. They were all in their places. The housemaid was dusting the room, so I could not examine them then. As I finished dressing Sir Ralph, he was taken with a shivering fit, as if he had the ague, but otherwise he seemed no wise different from the days before. I did not exactly suspect anything, but I felt uneasy. I watched all the day for an opportunity to get alone into the dining-room. At length, late in

the afternoon, I got there. I took down nearly every gun before I came to anything. At last I took down one that had been newly cleaned. I had just got it into my hand, when Mr. Goliath came in. I could not tell whether he had seen me or not, but he looked at me all the time I was in the room. I felt as if something were going to happen. The air seemed heavy.

“When Sir Ralph came up to dress I knew by his breath that he had been drinking wine. He talked by fits and starts; but what he said did not seem to belong together. He was in a hurry to get through dressing, but when he was dressed he did not appear inclined to go down. At length, seeing it was getting late, I told him that Captain and Mrs. Hartley must be in the drawing-room. He swore an awful oath at me, and went downstairs.

“That night there was no company, and Sir Ralph and Captain Hartley sat in the dining-room together. Mr. Goliath was not to be seen all that evening. I asked where he was. The

footman said he must have gone out, for that he had not seen him since the dessert was put on the table. I took occasion to pass by the place where his hat usually hung. It was there. I went upstairs and sat down and waited, I did not know for what. The time went on; I began to think that nothing would happen, when I heard the report of a gun. It seemed outside of the window. At first I could not move; then I ran downstairs. All the servants, men and women, were crowded together in the hall, whispering and exclaiming below their breath; the dining-room door was open. I pushed through them and went in. Captain Hartley lay on the floor; Mrs. Hartley was holding his head on her knee; Sir Ralph stood leaning against the sideboard; there was a great pool of blood at his feet. I did not notice Mr. Goliath. I looked at the place where I had seen the gun which had been cleaned. It was gone. I looked for it on the floor. It was not there. I heard afterwards that

Mr. Goliath had carried it away. That is all I know, Sir."

"Do you think Sir Ralph ever fancied you had suspected him?"

"No, Sir."

"And Goliath?"

"It was hard to tell, Sir. Sometimes I thought he did, and sometimes I thought he did not."

"You think Goliath was aware of the truth?"

"Yes, Sir."

"What gave you that impression?"

"A number of things, Sir. He was in the room the first one after Mrs. Hartley, so he must have been near. None of the servants knew where he was, so he could not have been in their part of the house, nor in the hall, and he could not have been out. There was a door which opened from the library into the passage near the butler's pantry. He could easily have got in and out of the library without anyone's seeing him."

“ You think he was watching there?”

“ Yes, Sir.”

“ What do you think had aroused his suspicions?”

“ He may have seen me put back the gun, Sir, and examined it himself, afterwards ; he may have had nothing but Sir Ralph’s ways to set him thinking. He had known Sir Ralph since he was a boy, Sir.”

“ Do you think Mrs. Hartley had any idea of the circumstances?”

“ No, Sir ;—if she had had ——”

Storrord paused.

“ Go on.”

“ I had rather not, Sir.”

“ Have you told me all you are inclined to communicate?”

“ Yes, Sir.”

“ Very well, there is the cheque. Say nothing of this.”

“ You may be very sure, Sir.”

And Walter departed.

Storrord took up the cheque, and placed it carefully in his pocket book.

“He is a fine young gentleman, is Mr. Arden,” he mentally soliloquized, “and he’s got a fine fortune too ; but if he is going to cross my lady’s path, I’d rather be in my place than in his. If he knew what I do—”

And Storrord shook his head ; while young Arden rode away, quite unconscious that in his zeal for mercy and justice he had placed himself in what might prove an awkward position were the case ever to be brought into court.

Walter had intended to dine with Doctor Jacobs, and to talk over the affair in the evening, but on reaching his house he found that the doctor was out, and would not be back till the evening, so he returned to the Hall.

CHAPTER VI.

ISABEL was in the drawing-room at the Hall when Walter returned from Renson Place. She was sitting in the window seat, her hands folded on her lap. Through the window behind her fell the last rays of the setting sun, slanting from between heavy, dark grey clouds; a few blood red bars streaked the horizon, and deepened by their contrast the sombre and stern colouring of the lowering masses above. The light rested upon her, shedding around the outline of her head a faint glory, beneath which her eyes looked out from the shadow of her face with a melancholy gaze.

Walter came forward and took her hand. It rested an instant, unresponsive yet trembling in

his; then she withdrew it, left the window seat, and placed herself by Mrs. Arden's side.

“It was all I could do to keep her when she heard you had come back, it really was,” said Mrs. Arden to her nephew. “She declared that I did not need her, and wanted to return at once.”

“She should have known how glad I always am to see my friends, especially those who are yours also,” he replied.

“Mrs. Arden sent over and invited me to cheer her up in her loneliness, as she called it,” said Isabel, “and how can I do that when she is not alone?”

The words were nothing, but there was an indescribable vibration of pain in them.

“You must remember that you have been tempting my aunt to wish me away again,” said Walter. “Lady Tremyss has gone up to London it seems.”

“Yes; Mamma went early the morning after we were here, and took up the bracelet. She

writes that it will be much handsomer than before. It was so kind in her, I was quite satisfied with it, as it was."

"I wonder she should have taken the trouble, so pretty as it was," remarked Mrs. Arden.

"Yes. Everyone says Mamma spoils me. I suppose it is true."

Isabel sighed.

"How lonely you must be, my dear, now that she is away," said Mrs. Arden compassionately. "I really don't like to think of you so solitary in that great house. I don't indeed."

"I miss Mamma, of course, but I do not mind being alone. I rather like it, except at night."

"Why not at night?" asked Mrs. Arden, whose interest rose at once. "Do you hear anything? Is there anything that frightens you?"

"I do not think I am exactly afraid; but there are such strange noises in my room at night, and I cannot find out where they come from."

“I do not think that at all astonishing; it would be strange if there were not noises in such an old house, and I have heard Lady Tremyss say that it is full of rats and mice,” rejoined young Arden, while his aunt’s eyes vibrated rapidly.

“Yes, but,—you will think it absurd, I know,—the sounds I hear at night beat time, time in cadence, and it is the cadence of a tune.”

Mrs. Arden turned a triumphant glance upon Walter.

“There, Walter, you aren’t going to say that rats and mice beat time, I fancy.”

“Did you ever hear the tune?” asked Walter, with sudden gravity, and without replying to his aunt’s inquiry.

“Yes, but I am sure again you won’t believe me; it is a tune Mamma used to play years ago, an old minuet, the only thing I ever heard her play; she caught it by ear.”

“And you hear it only at night?”

“Yes, almost every night.”

“How long does it last?”

“Sometimes as long as I am awake, sometimes not so long.”

“Yes, that’s always the way with spirits, always,” interposed Mrs. Arden. “There’s never any counting upon them. Sometimes they’ll manifest themselves for a fortnight, and then stop all at once.”

“Can you hear the sounds in the day time?” inquired Walter, who seemed more impressed by Isabel’s statement than by his aunt’s commentaries.

“No, only at night.”

“How does it beat time?”

“With a hammering sound.”

“I wonder if it’s a new sort of spirit,” remarked Mrs. Arden. “I never read of one that hammered. They always rap.”

“I don’t think it’s a spirit,” said Isabel, smiling in spite of herself.

“But what else can it be?” insisted Mrs. Arden. “It can’t be anybody alive, you know.”

“It is not probable that Isabel thinks anyone is really there hammering,” said Walter, with an air of singular preoccupation.

“Oh no, of course not; besides the cellars are not under that part of the house.”

“Then there is no excavation there whatever?”

“I think not?”

By one of those inexplicable coincidences which occur at times, and not unfrequently, to all of us; Mrs. Arden's next question was precisely that which Walter most wished to hear answered, though he would not ask it.

“By-the-bye, my dear, whereabouts is Sir Ralph's famous wine vault?”

“You will think it odd, but I really cannot tell you. It is a secret. I suppose Sir Ralph was afraid of his wine being stolen, for he never let any one know except Goliath. He had the rooms behind the dining-room locked up while the carpenter was at work; he would have only one. I remember him, he was a nice old man.”

“ But the stone-masons and labourers, who dug it out,—they must have known of course,” said Mrs. Arden.

“ Melvil told me that they worked a long way in from the cellars, and that when the vault was finished they filled up the opening and built up the wall just as it was before.”

“ Sir Ralph was a very odd man, very,” remarked Mrs. Arden, as if summing up her reflections on the subject.

“ Let us not talk of him now,” returned her nephew. And for a while all were silent.

The daylight had faded since Walter's entrance. The firelight seemed to grow brighter as the shadows fell without. It illumined Isabel's face as she sat, her cheek resting on her hand, her eyes fixed upon the flickering flame, rising, falling, fading, then leaping up anew again to fall, again to fade, and at last to die into coldness and darkness, only bitter ashes remaining to tell of what once had been. That requiem of hope, so dreary to all, so unutterably dreary to the

young, was intoning its dirge to Isabel's ear as she sat there.

She had grown to feel that she was as nothing to Walter. The hopes which his constant visits to the Park had sustained in their struggle against the discouragement as constantly resulting from the equable calmness of his manner, had gone out one by one. The last had been blighted by that recent chilling parting. She no longer feared, she knew that Walter did not care for her. She was left, passive, unresisting, stranded at the outset of her voyage. No bitterness mingled with Isabel's pain. She did not blame Walter, she did not blame herself; she suffered as a child suffers, its perceptions all absorbed by the intensity of its grief.

Young Arden could but too easily read her mood. The spectacle of her submissive endurance well-nigh unmanned him. As he looked on her, the heroic traits within him began to turn traitor. Since his own hopes of happiness were irretrievably gone, why should he not, at

least, do his best to make another happy? What was there to hinder him from marrying Isabel? Why should he stand aloof, and see that young girl suffer all the miseries of an unrequited affection, when one word from him would change her whole existence? Why should he not interfere to remove her from the baneful influence of Lady Tremyss, into an atmosphere free from the taint of crime? Why should he not save her from the gulf which was about to open under her mother's feet, and rescue her innocence from the impending doom of guilt.

The argument was specious,—it appealed to all that was noblest within him; with its artful casuistry reversing wrong into right, pleading for falsehood as if it had been truth; building up the cause of deception, and fortifying it with arguments drawn from God's best law.

For a moment the temptation was strong; but the young man's mind was of too firm a temper to be thus worked upon for more than a moment. His love of truth, his allegiance to duty arose in

their might. Neither for himself nor for another would he swerve from what he had always held to be right. He did not love Isabel. It would be wrong to marry her, not loving her, loving another. She would not wish him to marry her, such being the case. And even did he love her, could he marry Lady Tremyss' daughter?

Walter turned his eyes from Isabel's face, and Mrs. Arden, with her wonted penetration, wondered what made him frown so, and why he looked so displeased.

The summons to dinner came to break the silence of the drawing-room. The change of place seemed, however, to exert but little influence upon the respective moods of Walter and Isabel. The dinner passed but heavily. Isabel was unnaturally quiet, Walter conversed with effort, Mrs. Arden was the only member of the party who was inclined to talk. Fortunately she had exhausted all the *péripéties* of Edith's engagement before Walter had come in; her attention was now chiefly occupied with sub-

jects of local interest; but even these, in the course of time, came to an end, and the conversation languished anew. At length a sudden remembrance struck her.

“What was it, my dear, that you said you would tell me when Walter came in? It was when we were talking about Edith, don't you remember?”

“Yes, I wanted the pleasure of telling him myself,” Isabel answered, with more animation than she had hitherto shown. “What do you think,” she continued, turning to Walter, “Edith is coming to stay at Houston Lacy. Mr. Lacy came over this afternoon to tell me,—he is such a dear kind man,—that Mrs. Lacy has gone up to London and that she is going to bring Edith back with her for a visit. Is not that good news?”

Walter flushed violently with the various and contradictory emotions her words called up. Isabel looked at him, and turned pale. He was too absorbed in his own sensations to notice her

sudden change of colour, and Mrs. Arden's perceptions were not sufficiently quick to enable her either to observe Isabel's pallor, or, if observed, to trace it to its cause. Walter had not yet mastered the agitation of his thoughts when Mrs. Arden rose from the table, and with her, Isabel.

When he followed them into the drawing-room, he found Isabel stooping over some transparent embroidery stretched upon a small frame, while Mrs. Arden was plying her never-resting knitting needles. Isabel's attention was to all appearance totally absorbed by her occupation. Walter tried to draw her into conversation ; but meeting with faint success, he gave up the endeavour, and taking up a book, approached the lamp by which she was working, and began to read. He had held the same page open for about a quarter of an hour, when he heard Mrs. Arden say,

“ What is it, my dear? Does anything trouble you?”

“ I can't make the pattern come as it should do at this corner.”

Mrs. Arden came and leaned over the frame.

“ It looks right to me, quite right.”

“ But don't you see that there is no place for the rosebud? The shamrock and the thistle are too near together.”

A pause of examination followed, then Mrs. Arden summoned Walter.

“ No trouble at all,” he answered to Isabel's deprecatory remonstrance. “ Let me see it.”

And he took from her hand the frame.

On the transparent material stretched across it, Isabel was drawing a wreath of rose buds, shamrocks, and thistles.

“ What a tasteful design. Is it your own?”

“ No, I copied and enlarged it.”

“ They're all British emblems, you see, and yet it's just as pretty as if it were French, isn't it!” said Mrs. Arden, contemplating it admiringly.

“ But it was done by a Frenchwoman, the same I recommended to you, Madame Guillaume.”

“ It doesn't look like a French design, that is all that I can say, it really doesn't,” replied Mrs. Arden, returning to her chair and her knitting.

“It is a little singular that it should strike you so,” said Isabel, “for the woman’s handwriting is very English. I saw it on the bill for the things she sent. It isn’t at all a French hand.”

“Perhaps she is an Englishwoman who married a Frenchman,” said Walter.

“That may be, or perhaps she has taken a French name; a great many of these people do. Madame Julie, who makes all mamma’s nicest dresses, is not French at all, she is an Englishwoman.”

“I think it time things should be changed, if they have got to such a pass that Englishwomen cannot make a livelihood in their own country without giving themselves out as French, I really do,” said Mrs. Arden indignantly. “When I was a girl all the laces and embroideries people wore were English, and they looked quite as well dressed then as they do now-a-days.”

Mrs. Arden was interrupted by the opening of the door, and the announcement, “Lady Tremyss.”

Walter had not seen her since he had acquired the moral certitude of the hideous

tragedy of which she was the moving spring. He gazed at her as she advanced, the beautiful, graceful woman, hedged in by all the dignity and state which wait on wealth and high position ; he listened to the suave tones of her voice as she addressed his aunt, he saw her smile upon her daughter, and a sickening sense of disgust and loathing came over him. He seemed to behold a grinning skeleton through that fair, shapely form ; those blue veins distilled slow dropping poison ; those softly uttered words hissed upon his ear. It was with difficulty that he could force the customary words of courtesy to his lips. He withdrew to a little distance, seated himself with his back to the light, and watched her.

Mrs. Arden was saying something about her sudden departure.

“ Yes, I had the bracelet to give new orders about, and then those hundred-and-one things, which we are always putting off, had been accumulating for a long time. I was very busy all the while. You will be glad to hear, Isabel, that I

have bought a pair of chestnut horses. It is your favourite colour, I know."

"I think horses of that colour are apt to be vicious, don't you?" remarked Mrs. Arden. "The only time I was ever thrown was by a chestnut horse."

"But these are not for riding, you know," replied Isabel "and no matter what they are, mamma would soon break them in."

"I shall not need to take that trouble," said Lady Tremyss, "they are very well trained already. But you do not ask me about Miss Arden. I have seen her."

"Then you found time to go out to Arden Court?"

"Yes, I drove out there this morning."

"How was she looking?"

"Much the same as usual, quite unmoved by all the excitement she has just been through."

"Did you hear anything of her visit to Houston Lacy?" enquired Mrs. Arden. "Isabel says she's coming."

“Yes, Mrs. Lacy was to arrive there this evening, and Miss Arden and her father are to come down with her. The physicians think the change will be good for Mr. Arden.”

There was nothing in Lady Tremyss' look or manner which betrayed whether success or failure had attended her expedition, or whether or not her suspicions had been roused. Her unrevealing features kept their counsel well; and when, at the end of a half-hour, she departed with Isabel, Walter's scrutiny, close as it had been, had discovered nothing. He might as well have questioned one of the sphinxes at her gate as Lady Tremyss' face.

As they entered the carriage, Isabel sank back in the corner. She did not speak until they had turned into the high road, then she said,

“Is it to-morrow that Edith is coming, Mamma?”

“To-morrow. Are you glad?”

“Yes, of course, I am glad,—but, Mamma, I cannot talk,—I am so tired.”

Isabel shrank further into her corner, and mother and daughter drove on in silence until they reached the Park.

From her earliest childhood, Isabel had kept her deepest pleasures and all her pains to herself. Perhaps it may have been the reserve of the mother's character which was thus reflected in the child; perhaps it had a deeper root, and came into being with Isabel's first breath of life;—however that may have been, the latent secretiveness which was so strangely at variance with her otherwise frank and joyous character, never belied itself in any emergency of pain; and now her only desire was to shrink from her mother, from everyone, to go and hide herself away where she could be alone with her grief.

Lady Tremyss cast a glance after her daughter as Isabel bade her good-night in the hall, then she went into the drawing-room, locked the door, and resting her forehead on her hands, sat down to ponder and to resolve.

CHAPTER VII.

“DEAR me, Walter, I’ve had such a dreadful night!” said Mrs. Arden, as her nephew looking unnaturally stern and grave, took his place at the breakfast table on the next morning. “I don’t think I’ve shut my eyes once, I really don’t,” she sighed plaintively.

“You were not ill, I hope,” replied Walter.

“No; but I shall be if I have any more such nights.”

“What was the trouble?” inquired Walter, absently.

“The sounds—they never stopped till three o’clock, and by that time I was in such a flurry that I couldn’t sleep a wink even when the house

was still. I heard somebody walking—now don't say it was fancy, I positively did,—and I heard a chair move every once in a while, and then the steps would begin again. I assure you I got into such a state, you can't imagine!"

"I am very sorry," returned Walter, "but I had no idea that you would be disturbed by my sitting up."

"Then it was you, after all," said Mrs. Arden, with an expression of mingled relief and disappointment. "What on earth were you doing? And, dear me, now that I look at you, how pale you are. I'm afraid you are ill and it was that kept you up last night, I know it was."

"No, I was not ill—I was thinking," he answered gravely, and taking up his letters began to turn them over. Among them was one from Taunton. He opened it hastily.

"DEAR ARDEN,

"I said I would write when I had anything to tell. If instead of that I had said I would not

write until I had something to tell, I should not be writing now. But I think it is better to keep you informed of what I am about, that if you have any suggestions to make, you can let me know at once.

“I went this morning to the house in Chadlink Street. I saw the maid—I did not care to see the mistress. She declared, as I expected, that she knew nothing whatever about Mrs. Williams. However, I got from her a piece of information that will doubtless surprise you, and that is that a second person is engaged in the same enquiry. It seems that yesterday a lady called, and asked after this same Mrs Williams. She said she had heard of her as being ill and in distress; that she had called to see if she could be of any service. This roused my curiosity, of course. I cross-questioned the girl, and she said that she had very minutely inquired about Mrs. Williams, and as to her possible whereabouts. I can make nothing of this, but send it, thinking that you may find it useful. The lady was very handsome,

and wore her veil down all the time, the girl says.

“Next I obtained a detailed description of Mrs. W.’s appearance, and what was of still more consequence, I learnt that the girl had looked after her and seen her go into the baker’s shop in the same street.

“To the baker’s shop I went. The woman there said that she remembered perfectly Mrs. W. I asked her if she recollected her coming to her shop the day she left. She said she did, that Mrs. W. had a small bundle with her; she bought a roll, paid a little account she had there, and went away. I inquired if she had any idea where she had gone, and she replied that Mrs. W. had asked a direction, but all she could remember about it was that it was to a street that began with ‘Great.’ After trying a while to recall the name, she said she thought it was either Great Needham or Great Windham Street. The indication was not very precise, still it was something, so off I started for Great Needham Street.

I found nothing there. Then I went to Great Windham Street. I had not much choice of lodging-houses here ; there were but two, one for single gentlemen only, the other was a French lodging-house ; there was no Mrs. Williams at either. Then I tried all the private houses. I found one Mrs. Williams, but she was a cook, and did not answer at all to the description. So here I am this evening not a whit advanced.

“ To-morrow I shall begin a campaign, taking in all the shops that employ sewing women. The girl says she sews for the shops.

“ You told me that Mr. Daubenay set the detectives at work some three weeks ago, as the advertisement did not bring her out, so of course I shall not apply to them. If they had discovered anything you would know it through him.

“ I am very much interested in this matter : it is better than fox-hunting, and capital practice, as I told you before.

“ Let me hear if you have any suggestions to make, and believe me ever,

“ Truly yours,

“ JOHN TAUNTON.”

—Great Needham, Great Windham Street ;— certainly he had recently heard that address. What was it ? He had it written down somewhere.

He turned over the leaves of his memorandum book.

Yes, he was right. Madame Guillaume, thirty three, Great Windham Street. It was only Isabel's sewing woman. But what was it that Isabel had been saying about the English handwriting, and the frequency with which work-women assumed French names ? Guillaume— Williams ; it was certainly a coincidence. And then that wreath of British emblems. Was it possible that he had come at length on the scent ? that he had been carrying about with him that

very direction for days? But it would not do to be too sure; it was only a supposition after all. However coincidences were all that he had to guide him, here where everything was so uncertain where indications were so vague. He would write to Taunton to go back to the French boarding house, and ask to see Madame Guillaume. He would send an order for some embroidered handkerchiefs for his aunt, that would afford sufficient reason for his wishing to speak to her; and could Taunton but see her, the description would enable him to identify her at once. But no;—that would not do. Perhaps she was hiding herself, and a second application of the same person might arouse her suspicions. He would write to Taunton to ask some lady friend to drive there and see her, and give the order, and her description of the person would decide the question.

Walter despatched his new instructions to Taunton by that day's mail.

The discovery of the chain of circumstances that had placed the Daubenay ring in Lady

Tremyss' hands, had sunk into very secondary importance in Walter's mind, compared with another discovery, linked with which was the question of who and what Lady Tremyss was. In the utter uncertainty that shrouded her origin, he felt as if she might vanish as unaccountably and mysteriously as she had appeared. The only possibility that had yet offered itself of attaining any knowledge of her antecedents lay in the identification of Mrs. Williams, and to the accomplishment of this object young Arden charged his friend to strain every effort, offering him *carte blanche* as to expense.

The letter despatched, he ordered his horse, and rode over to confer with Dr. Jacobs. He had passed the preceding night in anxious thought; reviewing all the circumstances, comparing and weighing all the testimony connected with Sir Ralph's disappearance; and he had slowly arrived at a horrible but firm conviction,—the conviction that Sir Ralph had not been drowned, as had hitherto been believed, but that he still

draged on his life, a prisoner in the hands of Lady Tremyss and Goliath. Isabel's remarks on the beating in cadence at night had set his suspicions on the right track at length, and had enabled him to identify the very place of Sir Ralph's imprisonment. He was, without a doubt, immured in the wine vault. It was time to call in another; to ask the counsel of a man older and more experienced than himself; and a number of reasons, chief among which was the belief that he should find him fully disposed to co-operate in any plan that might shield Isabel, combined to fix his choice upon the old physician.

He returned at about two o'clock, asked for a cup of coffee, refused all other refreshment, mounted again, and rode away in the direction of the Park.

That morning it had been decided that delay might be dangerous, that he should not wait to hear further from Taunton, but that he should at once seek an interview with Lady Tremyss,

acquaint her with the charges against her, and offer her the choice of leaving England at once, or of remaining to await the result of a legal investigation. In the counsel he had held with Dr. Jacobs, the desire as far as possible to save Isabel had triumphed over every other consideration. Lady Tremyss' marriage settlement would be sufficient to support her abroad in luxury. Her acquiescence in the plan could scarcely be considered doubtful. The whole matter might be arranged secretly so that nothing should transpire until she had left England, and was with Isabel in safety.

“As to Sir Ralph and his wife,” Dr. Jacobs had said, “they seem well pitted against each other—devil against devil. The one thing to consider is how to save that poor girl.”

Walter had nerved himself to the immediate performance of his task, and it was with no feeling of relief that he learned at the lodge that both Lady Tremyss and Miss Hartley were absent. He rode on to the house. He would write and

leave a note asking for an interview the next day.

He entered the long, low, crimson and black drawing-room. As he glanced around it seemed curtained and draped with crime. The faces on the wall had a fixed and unnatural stare, the bronze busts were animated with an unreal and sinister life, the flowers on the table breathed forth heavy and sickening odours, the very sunlight that streamed within had in it something oppressive and suffocating. He walked to one of the windows and threw it open. As he looked without, the pines stood waving their dark branches slowly backward and forward with a beckoning motion, as if calling upon something invisible to come and listen to their inaudible revealings. He turned away from the window, sat down at Lady Tremyss' writing table at the end of the room, and commenced his note to her. As he was writing the last line he heard the approaching roll of carriage wheels. That must be she! He rose from his seat and stood ex-

pectant. The door opened. From the twilight of the hall appeared a slender form, a gentle face, —the face and form of Edith!

She did not notice him at first, apparently she did not know of his presence. She came forward, turning her eyes slowly around, as one who is recognizing familiar objects, one by one. As her glance fell upon him, she stopped, and stood visibly trembling. Walter did not move. Indignation rose uppermost in the whirl of his sensations. He had never thought that he could feel anger against Edith; but as he beheld her, pale, shrinking, quivering before him, a cold sternness mastered his every other feeling. She had rejected him whom she loved, sold herself for wealth and rank; no wonder she feared to meet him. He bowed silently, and moved towards the door. His touch was already on the handle, when a faint word sounded on his ear,

“Walter—”

He turned. Edith's eyes were fastened imploringly upon him. He hesitated a moment,

then strode towards her, took her hands in his, and gazed into her face. As he looked, the paleness of her cheek changed to pink, then to crimson. She withdrew her hands forcibly from his grasp, and covered her face with them. He led her to a sofa and seated her upon it, for she was still trembling. He leaned over her in silence.

“Oh, Edith, why — ?” broke at length from him.

She turned her head away without speaking. He rose from his stooping posture, retired a few steps, and drew himself to his full height. She glanced hurriedly up.

“Walter, do not go till I have told you that I hope you will be happy.”

“Happy—Edith, how dare you wish me happy !”

“What is it, Walter? What is it that you mean ?” she stammered.

“How dare you wish me happy, when —”

He paused. His look seemed to scathe her.

“And Isabel,” she added, with effort.

“Isabel—what of Isabel? Why do you speak of her? Do you think my affection so slight a thing that what you reject you may pass on to another?”

“But since it is so,” she answered timidly.

“Since what is so? Since I have nothing left to hope for, you wish me to hope? Since my every wish is destroyed, you wish me to turn my desires elsewhere? Edith, is this really you?”

Edith turned a bewildered gaze upon him.

“But Lady Tremyss—the letter—the poem,” she said faintly, at length, as he waited for her to speak.

“What letter? what poem?” asked Walter hoarsely, shuddering with anticipation of some coming disclosure of Lady Tremyss’ machinations.

“The serenade to—”

Edith’s voice stopped at the name.

A spasm writhed young Arden’s lips for an instant, then he slowly answered,

“Edith, have you believed?—” He paused,

then continued vehemently, "It was a translation wiled from me by that fiend."

It was some moments before either spoke again. Walter was the first to break the silence.

"And my letter?"

She cast upon him a quick, startled glance.

"I've had no letter."

"The letter I sent you when I found you had left the Hall; did you never receive that letter?" — Her father saw all the letters. Could he have kept that back? —

Edith's lips turned pale. They scarcely moved to frame the answering word,

"Never."

Walter left her and walked about the room. He returned and stood before her as she sat there so white, so wan, with such a world of anguish in her eyes.

"Edith, in that letter I told you that you were dearer to me than any words could say. I asked you to be my wife."

He paused for a moment, then continued, with the same enforced composure of manner,

“And now I ask you to break this engagement, to withdraw your promise, to refuse to marry this man, whom you do not love, and to give yourself to me.”

Edith's eyelids closed heavily; she did not answer; she seemed gathering up her strength.

He bent over her.

“We love each other, Edith. Is there anything that should part us?”

Edith's lips moved ineffectually once or twice before any sound came forth; at last, with an effort, she commanded her voice.

“Yes, Walter, there is one thing. It was my refusal of Mr. Averil that brought on my father's illness at Albansea. The physician said that any mental disturbance might bring on another, and that a second attack might prove fatal. My father's life may depend upon it. I must.”

Her voice had grown stronger as she proceeded. It fell clear and distinct on Walter's ear,

telling her unchangeable resolution. And what was to be urged against such a plea?

“We will not think of what might have been,” she continued. “Our duties lie apart. We can pray for each other, Walter. There can be no wrong in that. And when you pray, ask God to give me strength.”

A great silence seemed to fall around her as she ceased. She saw, as in a dream, Walter stoop and raise her hand, she felt his lips pressed to it, she beheld him leave the room. She tried to move, but could not. She sat stunned, stupefied for a while, then a keener consciousness returned, and with it her power of movement. She rose and left the room. She bade the servant tell Miss Hartley that she had waited for her as long as she could; then she quitted Ilton Park, and drove back to Houston Lacy.

Mr. Averil came out to meet her. He had arrived unexpectedly that afternoon. As she entered the drawing-room Mrs. Lacy accosted her.

“Oh, my dear, it is such a pity;—you had not been gone half an hour when Lady Tremyss and Miss Hartley drove up. They had but just gone. I think you must have met them. Did you return by the upper or the lower road?”

“I do not remember,” Edith replied.

“Not remember, my dear,” said her father, “why they are very different. One crosses the hill, and the other goes by the river.”

Edith made no reply, but turned her head away. The change of position brought her face more directly under Averil’s observation. He came towards her.

“You are not well,” he said. “Take my arm and let me lead you upstairs.”

“Is it headache? does her head ache?” asked Mrs. Lacy. “Oh, then, don’t tire her with taking her upstairs. She had better go into my boudoir and lie down on the sofa.”

While Averil placed Edith on the sofa in the boudoir, and arranged the pillows beneath her head, his sister drew closer the rose-coloured

curtains, and placed eau de Cologne and lavender water on a little stand beside her.

“There, now you shall rest. You will be better in a little while. I shall see that no one comes in to disturb you. Poor child, how white she looks!”

And Mrs. Lacy retired, softly closing the door.

Lady Tremyss had spoken falsely when she had said that Miss Arden, when she saw her, seemed much the same as usual. From the time of her return to Arden Court, Edith's health had rapidly failed. She uttered no complaints, when questioned said nothing was the matter with her; but she changed day by day.

Sir Joseph, at Averil's request, readily prescribed change of scene to Mr. Arden, and Edith passively acquiesced in its necessity. She had shown herself reluctant to go to Houston Lacy, but had at length yielded to her father's and her lover's urgent representations. Averil was to have followed them two days later. The business

which detained him in London was pressing ; but no sooner had Edith left Arden Court than he became uneasy, restless, impatient. He could not bear to have her separated from him by such a distance. He dreaded he knew not what. How deathlike she looked when he bade her good-bye. If anything were to happen before their marriage, —and Averil muttered a curse on the chance that might at the last moment interfere to frustrate his desires. Business might take care of itself. He would not stay in London. And leaving a short and sufficiently abrupt note for his lawyers, he had followed Edith by the night train that went down to Houston Lacy. When he arrived he had found that she was gone over to see Miss Hartley.

“ And I was very glad that she took it into her head to do so,” said Mrs. Lacy, “ for she seemed very listless and dispirited. I could hardly draw a word from her all the way down. I think, Ormanby, you ought to feel immensely flattered, such a beautiful girl as she is, too.”

The implied ascription of Edith's dejection to her separation from himself, did not seem to please her brother as much as Mrs. Lacy had expected.

“Ormanby never twists his moustache that way except something is the matter,” she mentally soliloquized. “I wonder what on earth it is!”

She had not yet arrived at any satisfactory solution, when the arrival of Lady Tremyss and Isabel came to divert her thoughts.

As Lady Tremyss, followed by her daughter, came gliding up the length of the great saloon, Mrs. Lacy drew in her breath; and Averil, though not easily moved to admiration, rose involuntarily to his feet. Like those snakes whose colours show only when they are excited by the approach of danger, or by rage, so Lady Tremyss' usually calm and colourless features had this day taken a new and peculiar brilliancy. Her long, dark eyes gleamed from between their lashes with an intermittent light that seemed to flash and play over her face, shedding on it a swift and shifting

glow. She glittered from her black velvet draperies like an opal as she greeted Mrs. Lacy, then turning to Mr. Averil held out to him her slender hand with softly-uttered hopes that in right of her affection for Miss Arden she might claim him also as a friend.

Isabel stood the while pale and silent. She seemed a white shadow by her mother's side; while Lady Tremyss, laying aside her habitual reserve out of compliment to her hearers, as it seemed, conversed with an easy, sparkling grace, new to Mrs. Lacy, often as they had met, and quite unexpected to her brother, who had been heard to say that Lady Tremyss' only fault was her being too statue-like. Little by little she directed her conversation more exclusively to Averil, flattering his pride by her prophecies of the brilliant success that awaited his young fiancée; soothing his vanity by her wily comments on the indescribable charm of that reserve which habitually induced her to veil her every deepest feeling under the semblance of indifference, one

might almost say of coldness; and rousing his self-complacency by her remarks on the rare sweetness of Miss Arden's voice and smile whenever any subject was introduced of interest sufficient to induce her to lay aside for the moment her usual somewhat haughty reticence.

“It is not long since I saw that smile,” Lady Tremyss added, turning an expressive glance upon Averil.

And Mrs. Lacy smiled brightly, and Averil's eyes glowed.—Was it possible that Edith's coldness was but maiden pride and shyness?—And Isabel's colour rose slowly.—Did Edith really love Mr. Averil instead of Walter!—

Lady Tremyss, passing on to the subject of Edith's delicacy of health, regretted that singular timidity which disinclined her for those exercises which would have otherwise proved so beneficial to her, and Isabel reminded her mother of Edith's partiality to Moira, and proposed sending her over for Edith's riding; which Averil, with characteristic jealousy of every past association

of Edith's life, refused, saying that he intended purchasing a pair of gentle ponies to drive her about with, as the stables at Houston Lacy contained nothing but thorough-breds.

“I have a great mind to try again to get away my little French pony from Mrs. Arden,” said Mrs. Lacy meditatively. “She bought it for her to ride last summer, when she was staying at Arden Hall. I was sorry after I had sold it, and tried a few weeks ago to buy it back; but young Arden would not let me have it, though I offered more than they gave for it.”

“Perhaps some pleasant associations laid their weight in the balance,” remarked Lady Tremyss. “I remember meeting them one day as he was walking by the side of Miss Arden's pony, the very same, I suppose. It was in a little shady, retired lane. She was looking up and smiling at something he was saying. I think I never saw a prettier picture.”

A lambent look of satisfaction played softly over her face, as if at the recollection of the

shady lane, the two youthful figures, and Edith's upward look.

Averil turned to Mrs. Lacy.

"I do not think it is at all worth while to make another attempt to get the pony," he said coldly. "I prefer Miss Arden should drive with me. I shall make enquiries directly for such a pair as I spoke of."

"If you really want two very gentle little animals, such as no one could possibly be afraid to drive with, I think I can tell you of a pair," said Lady Tremyss.

"You would do me a favour," Averil answered, with a tinge of constraint. The impression left by her description was still rankling.

"On second thoughts I will not mention where I think they are to be had, until I am more sure. I will send a groom when I return, to find whether their owner is still inclined to part with them. If so, I will drive my new chestnut pair over here to-morrow morning, and take you to look at them. Will that suit you?"

The unwonted fascination of her manner had begun to exert its compelling influence over Averil's displeasure; and as she raised her long, black eyes to his questioningly, yet with a tinge of timidity as if she feared a refusal, it vanished entirely. He accepted the invitation.

Lady Tremyss rose. Her net was cast.

“Come, Isabel, we must not trespass longer on Mrs. Lacy's time. We did but come to ask how soon Miss Arden was expected, and we have stayed nearly an hour. But we are not entirely to blame,” she added, with a glance of implied homage to the conversational powers of Mrs. Lacy and her brother.

Lady Tremyss and her daughter took their leave and were escorted by Averil to their carriage, an honour he had never before paid to any of his sister's guests.

As Lady Tremyss' carriage rolled away, Mr. Arden came downstairs from his afternoon nap. He seemed much discomposed at hearing of the recent visit.

“I am very sorry I did not see her,—a most distinguished woman,—and one to whom I am under such obligations.”

“Yes, indeed. That dreadful accident. You must always feel to her as you cannot do to anyone else,” said Mrs. Lacy sympathisingly.

She did not much like Mr. Arden, but she felt a certain kindly leaning towards one side of his character, his extreme affection for his daughter.

“Yes, but that is not the only thing. It was she—”

The banker, whose faculties had remained somewhat confused since his attack, which confusion showed itself especially after sleeping, here checked himself suddenly, perceiving that he was on a dangerous road.

Mrs. Lacy and Averil looked inquiringly at him. He walked to the window and gazed out.

“Here she is,” he said. The word “she,” pointed the direction of his broken sentence. What was it that he was going to say about

Edith that he would not complete? Averil looked sterner and colder than usual as he went to meet her.

But the coldness and sternness had disappeared now that he saw her lying back on the cushions of the boudoir, the rose-coloured light scarcely tinging the whiteness of her cheek. Pity for what he deemed her physical suffering replaced every other emotion. He drew a chair forward and seating himself beside her remained motionless, silently watching her face.

The remembrance of Lady Tremyss' reference to Edith's smile when anything touched her deeper feelings, the words in which she had implied that she had smiled thus at mention of him returned upon him, as he sat watching her.—If he could but once see that smile!—

Edith lay the while with closed lids, striving to reduce to order the rush and tumult of her thoughts. She dared not think of Walter, such thought was forbidden to her now; she shrank from the remembrance of Lady Tremyss' treachery,

of her father's duplicity, with that sickening revulsion which attends our first recognition that what we have loved, is base; what we have admired, is vile. At last her mind, wearied with pain, sought refuge in other reflections. With the sensitiveness of an over-conscientious nature, ever prone unduly to blame itself, she began to accuse herself of ingratitude towards her lover, of want of proper recognition of his unceasing care and anxious affection. She opened her eyes and turned them upon him. How sad, how troubled he looked. She extended her hand and smiled on him an instant, then her lids closed again, and the momentary expression vanished. She did not see the flush which mounted to his forehead, the gaze he fastened upon her pallid face.

—The time had come. She had begun to love him. —

Tempering his exultation, a new sensation stole through him, and sent the tears to Averil's eyes. They rose like a soft dew, purifying the grosser

strain of his nature. The sentiment with which he had beheld Edith on that first night at Albansea came back upon him, soothing, calming, elevating. Peace and gladness sang together their sweet choral in Averil's arid heart. At the sun went down, he rose from his seat beside her, and drawing aside the curtains, watched the red orb sink beneath the horizon, and saw the first stars shine out; and in his heart, for the first time since his childhood, Averil thanked God.

CHAPTER VIII.

THAT night saw Walter on his way to London. A telegraphic message had met him on his return to the Hall.

“Come up. J. T.” were the only words it contained.

He could hurry up to London by that night's express train, find out the cause of the summons, and return in time for his appointed interview with Lady Tremyss on the next evening. He wrote a hasty note to Dr. Jacobs, informing him of the cause of his absence and of its brief limit, and set forth.

The road passed near Houston Lacy. He turned his head from the lights that gleamed through its windows,—Edith was there.

The hours passed slowly to young Arden ; each seemed longer than the last. He tried in vain to sleep. The many exciting emotions of the preceding day chased all possibility of repose. At length he saw the dawn break over a dense, dark cloud of smoke. A few moments more, and he was at the terminus.

As he stepped out upon the platform, a tall, broad-shouldered figure rushed up to him, and caught him by the hand.

“ Arden, my dear fellow, she’s found ! ”

“ It all went on wheels from the time I got your letter,” Taunton resumed, as he stowed himself away in the cab which he had in waiting. “ I drove at once to a lady I know, a friend of my sister’s. The upshot of it is that she saw her. She says she is not French, but English, and describes her exactly as the maid-servant did. It seems your idea was correct as to the change of name. And now we’ll have some supper, and you shall go to bed for three or four hours, and then you can be off.”

The next morning saw Walter at Great Windham Street.

“ Non, Monsieur, elle n’y est pas. Elle est sortie ; il y a à peu près une heure. Si Monsieur voudrait bien laisser son nom ? ”

“ Can you tell me when she will return ? ”

“ Elle ne reste jamais dehors plus que deux heures à la fois. Elle va rentrer bientôt. Monsieur voudrait il l’attendre ? ”

Taking his assent for granted, the girl retreated into the entry, and threw open the door of a small back parlour. Walter followed her. As he entered, he slipped a piece of money into her hand.

She closed the door, and examined the coin with a puzzled expression, as if its large silver disk could enlighten her. The investigation seemed to lead to no satisfactory result, for she raised her eyebrows pensively as she dropped it into her pocket.

“ Et pourtant elle n’est pas bien jeune, ” she

said to herself, as she returned to her duties,
“ Que ces Anglais sont drôles ! ”

Mademoiselle Josephine's hastily conceived suspicion that ce beau monsieur was enamoured of the rather elderly Madame Guillaume in no wise diminished the sharpness of the watch she kept upon the door. Half-an-hour had not elapsed when Walter heard her quick step in the entry, the street-door was thrown open at the same moment that the bell rang, and Josephine's voice came to his ears in rapid discourse.

“ Et le v'là, ce monsieur. ”

The parlour door opened, and a gentlewoman appeared on the threshold.

Walter rose and bowed. She saluted him with the air of a person accustomed to good society, and stood waiting for him to speak.

“ Madame Guillaume, I believe. ”

“ The same, Sir. ”

What was he to say to her? Strange that he had not thought of that before. He must order

something ;—awkward,—she looked so like a lady.

“ Excuse me, Madam, I come to ask if you are able to provide for me some embroideries ?”

“ That is my occupation, Sir.”

“ I should like some—some—” what did people wear?—“ an embroidered dressing-gown.”

“ For yourself, Sir ?”

A tendency to a smile appeared for an instant amid the grave lines of Mrs. Williams’ mouth.

“ No ; for my aunt, I mean. Can you let me have any such thing ?”

“ I have none ready-made, Sir. I could embroider one ; but it would take a long time, and the expense would be great.”

“ That is of no consequence.”

“ Shall I show you my patterns, Sir ? Perhaps you may have a choice as to the design.”

“ Yes ; I should like to see them.”

And Mrs. Williams retired.

No ; that woman was all right,—lady-like, dignified, conscientious. It required no effort of

discrimination to read her character,—face, expression, demeanour, all were consistent. This Mrs. Williams was trustworthy. How had she ever become involved with such a being as Lady Tremyss.

Walter's meditations were interrupted by the return of Mrs. Williams, with a portfolio in her hand.

“ I think, Sir, you may find here some patterns to select from.”

She opened the portfolio, and spread the drawings it contained upon the table.

They were delicately and gracefully composed, evidently the work of a practised pencil. As he turned them over, young Arden caught sight of a small pattern for a collar, the same wreath of rosebuds, shamrocks, and thistles, which he had seen Isabel copying. An idea struck him,—he must venture something,—this offered an opportunity for doing so without rousing her suspicions.

“ I think I have seen this before,” he said,

drawing the sheet from under that which Mrs. Williams had just placed upon it.

“It is possible, Sir. I have worked a number of that pattern.”

“Yes; I am quite sure of it. I saw it but a few days since. It is very pretty. I noticed it particularly.”

Mrs. Williams did not seem at all interested, she continued to turn over the drawings.

“May I ask for whom you worked it?”

“Certainly, Sir. I sent half-a-dozen of that design, and half-a-dozen of this—” she held up another pattern, “to Lady Tremyss, in Warwickshire, a short time since. I worked a set for Miss Horsford, of Watertree Lodge, just before.”

“Then I was right. I saw Miss Hartley with this pattern.”

“Not Miss Hartley, Sir. Miss Horsford, I said.”

“Perhaps so; but I refer to Miss Hartley, Lady Tremyss’ daughter by her first husband, Captain Hartley.”

“ Captain Hartley, did you say, Sir? Captain Hartley—”

She looked at him eagerly an instant, then its expression of habitual depression returned to her face.

“ Excuse me, Sir; I used to know a Mrs. Hartley, the wife of a Captain Hartley; but, of course, it cannot be the same.”

“ Why of course? The name is not particularly common.—Ah! there is a pretty design.” And Walter bent his head over a group of daisies wreathed around a coronet.

“ It would be too fortunate if it were so, Sir,” she answered sadly.

“ It would be very easy to ascertain. Would you describe the Mrs. Hartley you used to know?”

“ She was the most beautiful woman I ever saw, Sir. She was dark :—I can't well describe her. There was something strange about her. She scarcely ever smiled. I never saw her laugh. I never saw anyone at all like her.”

“A very singular person she must have been?” remarked young Arden, tacitly allowing Mrs. Williams to conclude that Lady Tremyss and Mrs. Hartley were two different characters. “Who was she before she married, did you say?”

“I can’t tell, Sir. All I know is that for some years she was in a French convent.”

“Indeed.—In France, I presume. This also is very tasteful. I shall want some pocket handkerchiefs like these.” He examined a pattern.

Mrs. Williams’ faded eye brightened a little at the prospect of well paid work opening before her.—What a pleasant young gentleman this was.—She forgot about the convent.

“You were saying the convent was in France, I believe.”

“No, Sir. In Montreal.”

“Ah, really. And I suppose her parents took her out.”

“No, Sir; she ran away.”

“This is quite an interesting story,” and Walter smiled. “Wouldn’t you indulge me by

going on with it while I look over these patterns? I haven't quite made up my mind as to which of these three I like best."

Walter placed the three designs in a row before him, and seemed intent on their different outlines. "Ran away! how did she get out?"

"There is not so much to tell as perhaps you fancy, Sir; but I will tell all I know."

"That's right.—Tell it all from the beginning," said Walter, trying to render his tone careless.

Walter's courteous manner, his kindly smile, were pleasant interruptions of the monotonous routine of Mrs. Williams' daily life. She felt disposed to humour the handsome young gentleman's appetite for romance, boyish though it seemed.

"My husband was chaplain of the regiment to which Captain Hartley belonged, Sir; that is the way in which we came to be called upon by Captain Hartley to help him."

Walter shifted the drawings.

"Late one night Captain Hartley came

and called down my husband. He came back and told me to get up quickly and dress myself, and come downstairs. I did so, and there I found Captain Hartley and a nun. My husband married them. He translated the service into French as he went along, for it appeared that the nun could speak no English. She did not look timid or frightened,—she looked fierce;—but such a beautiful creature I never expect to see again.

“ I was so surprised, and I will say frightened, for the danger of such a thing was great, that I did not know what to say. I felt very much inclined to tell Captain Hartley to take her away when he asked me to keep her with me. But it was difficult to refuse Captain Hartley anything, and at last I consented. How he got her out we never knew. He was bound to secrecy, he said. I have often wondered what became of her and of him.”

Mrs. Williams paused and seemed absorbed in recollection for a while.

“ Then he left the regiment in which your

husband was chaplain?" said Walter, desirous of recalling her to her story.

"No, Sir. My husband became a Baptist and left the service. And so I have quite lost sight of them."

"Then you know nothing more of Captain and Mrs. Hartley?"

"This was afterwards, Sir, some two or three years afterwards. As I was saying, we kept her. Nothing was ever said about her escape in Montreal that I heard of, though I have no doubt they searched for her everywhere."

"Her parents must have been greatly distressed."

"She was an orphan, Sir,"

"What was her name?"

"Ignatia."

"I mean her family name."

"That was one of the odd things about her, Sir; she would never answer any question about herself, not even tell what her name was. If we made any reference to her past, she would turn

one of her sidelong looks upon us and remain silent.”

“ Captain Hartley must have known.”

“ Perhaps so. I cannot tell, Sir. If he did know he never told us, and I think he would have done so, for we were long together in India afterwards.”

“ Ah.”

“ Yes, Sir; and I was very glad when we left Canada, for during the three or four months I had her in the house, I had not any peace of mind.”

“ And you went to India?”

“ The regiment was ordered off that summer, Sir. Captain Hartley begged me to take charge of her on the way. She always remained the same. After we got to India, she insisted upon following her husband in all the marches and fighting; and the officers and men both said that she seemed like an evil spirit when there was any bloodshed going on.”

“ Did she ever have any children? That might have softened her, one would think.”

“Yes, Sir ; she had a little girl a year after she was married, but she seemed to care but little for it until it begun to grow like its father. Then she changed to it, and would hold it and look at it for hours together when he was away ; when he was by she never minded it. It was a pretty child. I had the principal care of it, for we shared the same bungalow.”

Again Mrs. Williams’s eye wandered as if back into the past.

“Were you long together?”

“Two years in India, Sir. Then my husband’s health broke down, and he exchanged into another regiment. Shortly after, Captain Hartley’s regiment was ordered to Gibraltar. Before long my husband left the service, as I have said, and since then I have known nothing of them.”

Walter rose. It would not do to show too great curiosity, he had risked much as it was.

“Thank you. It is really quite a peculiar story, quite interesting. I think I should prefer the dressing-gown to be embroidered with this

Greek pattern, only I think the wreaths around it should be a little broader.”

“Of course, Sir; for so large an article the whole design must be enlarged. I think it would be better to make it a finger broad, Sir, instead of half a finger, as it is here.”

“I will leave it entirely to you.” He took up his hat. “But certainly there is something I wanted to say. Ah, yes. It was about the story. Did this Mrs. Hartley possess no family relics, no ornaments, or something of that sort that could have thrown any light on who she was?”

“I never saw but one ornament in her possession, Sir; and that was a ring which she could not have valued much, for she gave it to me when we left the regiment.”

“That would scarcely have thrown any light on the subject; rings are very much alike for the most part.”

“But this was not like most rings. It was set with a curious orange-coloured stone.”

“That is odd.”

“Yes, Sir; it was very curious, and it was held by two eagle’s heads.”

“That is a singular coincidence. It answers to the description of the Daubenay stone.”

“I never heard of that stone, Sir.”

“Perhaps you would be so kind as to let me look at it?”

A slight flush rose on Mrs. Williams’s cheek.

“I am sorry, Sir; but the ring is no longer in my possession.”

“I am sorry too. I should have liked to have seen it. Good morning.”

And Walter was about leaving the room.

“Excuse me, Sir; but I believe you have forgotten the address to which I am to send the dressing-gown and handkerchiefs?”

Walter tore a leaf from his memorandum book, wrote the address, got into the brougham, and drove to the railway station.

“Just in time, Sir,” said the guard. “Here, Sir,—quick, Sir. No baggage, Sir? All right.”

The first strokes of the piston shook the train as Walter sprang into the railway carriage. The many irregular sounds attending the passage of the convoy merged themselves at length into one; a pulsating rattle resounded, beating out with iron touch its constant refrain to Walter's ear as he was whirled back towards the work awaiting him.

CHAPTER IX.

AVERIL had awaked that morning ill at ease. The glad expectations, the alluring hopes which had heralded in his slumber on the preceding night, had given place to a vague disquietude. As he completed his toilet, he dismissed his valet, drew aside the curtains, and threw open the window. The fresh air would dissipate that unwonted sensation. He looked abroad, over sweeping lawn and sheltering woodland, to the hills beyond. Every object appeared clothed with strange and startling vividness. Every sound came, scarcely veiled by distance, clearly and sharply upon his ear. He heard the far-off song of the labourer as though it had been on the

terraced walk beneath him. As the wind came sweeping across the lawn it pressed a distinct and palpable touch upon his forehead. Never had his perceptions been so powerful, never had he felt so keenly the life in his veins; yet this increased vitality had nothing pleasurable in it. It seemed grasping eagerly at all within its reach; grasping hungrily, not lovingly. He turned away from the landscape, closed the window, and sat down before the fire. Strange faces looked out at him from the red embers below; the leaping flame above seemed waving backward and forward like a fiery sword. He rose with an abrupt movement. As he did so he caught sight of his face in the glass over the mantel-piece. There was an unaccustomed expression upon it. It looked to him like a stranger's face. The eyes were deeper, more dilated than usual, the cheek paler, the forehead more gloomy.

He muttered a curse upon the blue devils, and leaving the room, descended to the breakfast-

room. Edith had not yet come down. She had slept badly. She would take her breakfast in her own room.

The intelligence did not tend to enliven Averil's mood. He breakfasted in silence, then took his hat and walked out into the shrubbery. After a while he returned and sought his sister in her sitting-room.

“Ellen, what was that thing you were playing last night; that little song?”

She started and flushed.

“Good gracious, Ormanby. I didn't know you could hear me. I wouldn't have played it if I had thought—”

“Come into the drawing-room and play it to me now.”

He led the way while his sister followed him, an unwonted expression of concern upon her face. She opened the pianoforte and took her seat at it. With trembling touch she played a simple, plaintive little air.

“ Now sing it,” he said, as she finished.

She stole a half-frightened glance at his face, and obeyed.

I saw a maiden sitting by the sea ;
Dark clouds of grey curtained the pallid sky,
And as she sang, the moaning wind sobbed by:
“ Wilt come to me?”

“ Here come and dwell beside this moving sea,
And list the sea gull’s melancholy cry,
And watch the white waves toss their foam on high.
Wilt come to me?”

“ There is no better home where thou mayst be;
Thou canst not choose a mansion broad and high,
Here must thou dwell with me, and ceaseless sigh,
“ I’ve come to thee.”

As she ended, Averil turned and walked out of the room.

“ Poor Clara,—poor, poor Clara,” Mrs. Lacy murmured to herself as she sat before the piano. “ How can he bear to hear it, when she used—”

She paused and sat awhile in thought, then closed the piano and went back into her sitting-room. Averil was not there. She did not see him again till Lady Tremyss drove up to the door

with her two prancing chestnut horses. Then from the window of her boudoir Mrs. Lacy saw her brother come down the steps, enter the light open carriage, take the reins from Lady Tremyss' hands, and drive down the sweep of the avenue.

“What a pity that Edith didn't come down before he went out. However, he will be at home before long. What a lovely day for a drive.”

And Mrs. Lacy smiled at the sunshine, smiled at the circling pigeons, smiled at the little dog which came jumping up at her hand, and turned back to her interrupted note, as Averil and his companion issued from the avenue and came out upon the road.

Lady Tremyss watched his face from under the covert of her black plumed hat and lace veil. The heavy cloud which hung brooding over it offered no indication of a nature to encourage conversation. They drove on in almost unbroken silence over the gently swelling ridges of the

corn lands, past the sphinxes and dark pine avenue of the Park, up the steep hill beyond, and across the broad stretch of level land which lay still further on, until they drew up at Marsh Manor.

“Good morning, good morning,” said Mr. Marsh, coming forward from where he was sunning himself and smoking his cigar on the southern side of the Manor House. “You have come over to see the ponies, I suppose? I hear you sent about them yesterday. That’s a fine pair you’re driving.”

He advanced and laid his hand on the neck of the one nearest him. The horse backed, reared, shied, and was not reduced to quiet without some exertion on Averil’s part.

“A young horse, a young horse,” said Mr. Marsh, looking distrustfully at the animal’s wild eye and open nostril. “You wouldn’t get Lady Emily to stir a step with that horse in the traces. I have bought three pair of carriage horses since last September, in hopes to get something

quiet enough to suit her, and last of all I bought these ponies, and now she won't use them. She says she never feels safe in a pony-carriage since Mrs. Dartmouth's ponies ran away with her. But I'll have them brought round; they are pretty little things."

The appearance of the ponies fully justified Mr. Marsh's encomium, and they gave satisfactory evidence of their tameness by thrusting their noses into his hands in quest of sugar, with an ample stock of which delicacy Mr. Marsh's pockets were always lined.

The ponies were purchased, and Averil and Lady Tremyss, with polite messages and excuses for Lady Emily, turned on their homeward way.

The interview with Mr. Marsh, perhaps the sight of his round, good-humoured face and the sound of his cheery voice, joined to his satisfaction in his new purchase, had changed Averil's mood. He seemed wish to atone by extra courtesy for his taciturnity during the first part of the drive. Little by little Lady Tremyss turned the

conversation upon the families in the neighbourhood. The name of the owner of Arden Hall was mentioned. She assumed an air of slight reserve, and appeared disposed to change the subject. Averil alluded distantly to the report of his engagement to Miss Hartley.

“Oh, no. I assure you there is nothing of the sort. Certainly you must know—”

She checked herself.

Averil's attention was awakened, less by her words than by her manner.

“Know what?”

“Oh, nothing, nothing at all.”

He looked inquiringly at her.

“I assure you there is nothing.”

But Lady Tremyss' somewhat hurried protestations had not the effect of convincing Averil.—She was keeping something back.—

“I must beg you will be so kind as to tell me to what you alluded just now when you spoke of the absence of any truth in those reports,” he said, somewhat peremptorily.

“Oh, it was the merest thing in the world, the most natural. Indeed it would have been very strange had it not been so.”

“Been how?”

Averil's voice was taking a tinge of impatience.

“Miss Arden is such a very lovely girl, you know.”

“I do not perceive the connection,” he replied, with some hauteur.

“But surely you must be the last person to blame him,” she responded, smilingly.

“To blame whom?”

“Mr. Walter Arden, of course.”

“And for what is it that I am not to blame him?”

“For his sentiments towards Miss Arden, certainly.”

“Ah.”

“Seeing so much of her as he did, I really can't see how he could help himself.”

Averil compressed his lips.

“Highly natural, as you say. Not at all to be wondered at.”

“Yes; especially as of course her manner was more open and frank to him as a relation, than it is in general.”

“Of course; and her manner deceived him.”

“I did not mean exactly that. I meant—I—Indeed I know nothing about it.”

Lady Tremyss' own manner was decidedly embarrassed.

“But it would have been only reasonable that she should have been somewhat pleased by the attentions of Mr. Arden.”

“Yes, precisely—pleased with his attentions.”

Lady Tremyss seemed relieved.

“Possibly a little touched by them.”

“He is really so handsome and intelligent, you know.”

She spoke apologetically.

“Quite sufficiently so to attract a very young girl.”

“Yes, I think that was it I think she was

attracted by him—a little.” Her tone was guarded.

“Very probably interested in him more than she was aware of.”

“A *tendre*, you know,” she answered soothingly; “a young girl’s sentiment, such as soon dies out of itself when its object is removed.” The dread of giving pain was plainly observable in her manner.

A spasm of jealous rage wrung Averil’s inmost core. So, this girl he had thought so cold, had not been cold to another. And how many knew it? Had it been the common chit-chat of the place? No, his sister would have told him. Her constant letters kept him informed of every item of intelligence in the neighbourhood. Lady Tremyss and her daughter had seen Edith more intimately than anyone else had done; they would perceive what others might fail to discover. Mr. Arden’s words returned to his mind—“It was she—” Did they relate to this?

“Nothing more natural, of course. But the

people around seem to have been blind to it. It is not every one that has Lady Tremyss' penetration."

She smiled gently.

"Young Arden would scarcely thank me for the result of my discovery. I fear he would never speak to me again did he know."

"Is it possible that you interfered to cross his hopes?"

"In the most unconscious manner in the world. I happened to be writing to Mr. Arden at the time, to thank him for a *cadeau* he had sent me, and, very naturally, I spoke of the admiration Miss Arden excited in everyone, and by chance mentioned her cousin. The next day he came down and took her away. I do not think there was any serious harm done on either side; and certainly, as events have turned out, it was a most fortunate slip of the pen on my part."

She smiled again through the black frost work of her veil.

—No serious harm done. He could have shot

Arden on the spot if he had met him. It was he then that had gathered those sweet first-fruits of Edith's affection. It was he who had awakened her coy tenderness. This young Arden had gained what had been so coldly refused to him—her promised husband. A dark red flush mounted to Averil's forehead. Lady Tremyss watched him askance. For a while they drove on in silence, then she resumed the conversation.

“I take the deepest interest in Miss Arden,” she began pensively, and with a tinge of reluctance in her manner. “So very lovely and unsuspecting a girl. And the worst of it is that the very innocence of such a nature sometimes intervenes perplexingly.”

Averil shot a piercing glance at his companion.

“You talk like a sphinx,” he replied.

“Perhaps I had better not have touched on the subject at all,” she responded, averting her eyes. “If I have been indiscreet you must excuse me, I am really so very fond of her.”

“May I ask to what subject you refer? I am quite ignorant of your possible meaning.”

The flush was fading. Averil had begun to grow pale.

“But of course she mentioned it to you—I refer to yesterday afternoon.”

“She mentioned nothing.”

Lady Tremyss looked much disturbed.

“I am afraid I have done wrong—I thought, of course— But doubtless she had some good reason.”

“Reason for what?”

“For not speaking of it. I think it was a mistake on her part—entire openness on such matters is so much better. But then if there were any remains of sentiment—”

She paused. Averil turned his face full upon her.

“Lady Tremyss, I request you to state what circumstance has occurred.”

His eye was bloodshot and haggard, his cheek

of a yellow hue; the contraction of unendurable pain was on his forehead. She had tortured him to the requisite point. The train had been well laid; one sentence more and it would explode, and Walter and Edith be separated for ever. The long, dark eyes veiled themselves with feigned compassion under their lashes; Lady 'Tremyss' voice sank to a plaintive minor, as she replied,

“Pray do not be disturbed; it was possibly accidental. I hope you will not attach undue weight to it; but—I am sure it was very painful to her, poor girl, she looked quite overwhelmed, they say, after it—while I was absent at Houston Lacy, yesterday afternoon, Miss Arden and her cousin met and spent a long time together at the Park.”

A maddened oath escaped Averil's lips. He struck fiercely at the horses in a sort of blind fury. The spirited animals reared upright, sprang forward, gained the ridge of the hill they were ascending, and rushed unmanageably down the

abrupt descent on the other side. A cloud of dust enveloped the horses, the carriage, and those within, and rolled rapidly on with them, hiding the whole from sight.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN the railway train stopped at Wodeton, Walter saw by the light of the station, on the edge of the platform, one of the grooms from the Hall. As he descended, the man came up and touched his hat.

“I beg pardon, Sir, but Missis has sent the horses down for you.—There’s been an accident, Sir.”

“Well,” said young Arden hoarsely, as the man paused, as people always do at such moments.

“Yes, Sir; an awful accident, Sir. Lady Tremyss and Mr. Averil have been run away with by the new horses; and they were

thrown out, and Mr. Averil was killed on the spot, and Lady Tremyss is dying, Sir."

The man stopped as if in expectation of some remark from his master. Young Arden said nothing. The sound of his heavy breathing alone filled the pause.

"Missis has sent the horses, Sir. She begs you will go directly to Farmer Robeson's. My lady is there."

As the man finished his sentence, Walter sprang into the saddle and galloped towards the farm. In the dim twilight, as he passed the long stone wall at the foot of the hill, he saw the wreck of the carriage crushed up on the edge of the road. Doctor Jacob's four-wheeled chaise was in the farm yard. Farmer Robeson was standing at the gate. He took off his hat as the young Squire dismounted, but that was all. Mrs. Robeson came to the house door. The candle flickering on the table in the passageway showed her rosy face paled with dread. She spoke below her breath.

“She’s there, Sir.” She pointed to the door of the best room, but without approaching it. “Doctor Jacobs is with her, Sir. Will you go in?”

While she spoke, the door of the room she had indicated softly unclosed, and Dr. Jacobs came out. Mrs. Robeson stepped backward into the kitchen, and shut herself in with Melvil and some of the other servants, all of whom Doctor Jacobs had forbidden the room where their lady lay.

The old physician wrung Walter’s hand in silence.

“God has taken it into his own hands,” he said.

“Is she dying?”

“Yes. Come in.”

The young man drew back.

“But Isabel?”

“She is not here.”

“Not here!”

“I sent her away, she is with Mrs. Arden. I made a pretext of the danger of its agitating her

mother should she see her when she recovered her senses. I don't dare to have anyone in the room. God knows what that woman may have to say, should she speak."

He preceded Walter into the room.

On a mattress stretched on the floor lay Lady Tremyss, her face of a chalky white, her eyelids closed. A bandage was around her head, her long black hair, unfastened, rested on the ground. A faint motion of her chest alone disturbed the lifelessness of her posture, alone told that she was not already dead.

"She is not conscious?"

"No."

"Will she regain her senses before she dies?"

"I cannot tell."

They stood and watched her in silence by the light of the solitary lamp on the chest of drawers at her head. As they stood, they perceived a slight shiver run along her frame. Her eyelids heavily lifted, closed, then lifted again. Dr.

Jacobs bent over her. She feebly raised her hand and motioned him away, without looking at him. He drew back to where Walter was standing out of the range of her sight. She looked intently forward, as though the wall before her were transparent, and she saw beyond.

“I am coming,” she whispered. “Listen, Edward, my brave. I am coming. It is not finished, but I must come.”

She paused, her breath fluttered, then grew steadier again. She whispered anew.

“I see you smile. You have drunk the tears of your enemy, you have laughed to hear his groans. You have looked down from the eternal fields, and your soul has rejoiced to see him where he lies in cold and darkness, alone.”

Her eyes closed, her breast laboured.

“Wait,” she gasped more faintly.

There was an interval. Dr. Jacobs bent noiselessly over her, then rose to his feet.

“She is almost gone,” he whispered, in reply to Walter’s look.

“ I follow,” she faintly murmured once more. Then all was still. The physician laid his hand upon her heart. It had stopped.

She was dead. That woman of mystery and crime lay dead before them, looking with stony gaze out from the curtain of that silence which now was never to be broken. Who was she? Whence did she come? What early links had bound her life to the life of others? Where was her home, and what her parentage? Vain questions all, incapable of response, mocking the asking ear with their empty form, void of meaning to the enquiring sense.

They stood and gazed upon her as she lay in her strange beauty, dead. She had not repented, she had not sorrowed, she had not confessed. She had died exulting in her guilt. Where was she now? Before what tribunal did she stand, snatched from earth's judgment into the darkness and stillness of the grave? What doom lay for her beyond?

They did not pray. They did not ask God's mercy on her soul. With hushed steps and silent lips they retired from the chamber where lay the corpse of Lady Tremyss.

CHAPTER XI.

THE morning dawned redly on the broad front of Houston Lacy, where Edith sat, still in the dress she had worn on the preceding day, her hands crossed before her, her eyes fixed upon the brightening sky, on whose expanse all night long they had watched the darkness, and by the far illumination of the stars, had contemplated the mystery of death.

Those first rays rested on the mellow walls of Arden Hall, and stole cautiously between the curtains of the room where Isabel lay sleeping the heavy slumber of exhaustion, worn out with passionate grief.

Rising higher, they poured down upon the

long, grey pile of Ilton Park, darting athwart the dark tops of the surrounding pines, avoiding one closed, dim chamber, where sat the watchers by the dead; but piercing the small panes of the ancient windows below, as if hastening to bring their aid to those who, with anxious faces and restless steps, were still seeking, seeking as they had sought all night; save when they had paused to listen to the muffled sound of hammering below, with intermittent stroke imaging forth as if in mockery the shadowy semblance of the antique dance.

Entrance to that subterranean dungeon there was none. Goliath had not been seen since the preceding evening, and with him all knowledge of the wine-vault was lost. The position of the door was unknown to all the household; nor did young Arden and Doctor Jacobs choose to make any enquiries, to arouse suspicion in the minds of the servants. They had called no aid. They had sought all night alone, sounding the walls, testing the floors, the wainscoting; search-

ing for secret springs and hidden hinges—baffled at every step. They had descended to the cellars, and paced their length; then, returning, had measured off the distance of the story above. The cellars extended no further than the library. Sir Ralph's prison-house must lie beyond. They had forced the door of the dancing-room at the commencement of their search; but their closest scrutiny had failed to discover any irregularity in the long line of panelled mirrors, the unbroken uniformity of the embrasures of the windows, the straight-lined regularity of the oaken floor. They listened anew at the wall.

The sounds, a while intermitted, began again.

The two men gazed on one another.

“What can it mean?” said Walter, fixing his eyes on the old physician's face, which, seen in the dim light, had taken an expression of sinister apprehension.

“*He is mad,*” replied Dr. Jacobs, and, taking up the candle, he pursued anew the search.

They quitted the dancing-room, with its faint,

fearful echoes ; they sought in the labyrinth of vacant rooms beyond.

Again they went over the ground they had examined, and again they paused in discouragement.

“ There would be no use in asking any questions of the servants,” said young Arden. “ Isabel said a few days ago that no one, not even herself, knew. It is day-light now. I will saddle a horse, and ride over to Renson’s. It is possible that Storrord may know ; at any rate, he can tell who was the carpenter who did the wood-work.”

“ Stay,” said Doctor Jacobs, as Walter turned away, “ you must have a reason to give. Say that Miss Hartley is not well, and that I want a bottle of Sir Ralph’s old cordial from Sicily for her ; that will answer.”

Walter took his way to the stables, saddled a horse, and rode away at speed through the early sunlight towards Renson Place.

A messenger had been despatched the night be-

fore to Sir Ralph's nearest of kin, a third cousin. He would probably reach the Park that afternoon; but he could not be waited for,—Sir Ralph might be without food meantime.

The night-capped porter at the lodge at Renson Place stared at Walter as he passed; the gardener stopped on his way to the forcing-house and looked after him. “What on earth brought young Squire Arden over, riding like mad, at that time of the morning?” The maid servant, dusting in the hall, with the door wide open, dropped her brush as he sprang up the steps, and leaving it where it had fallen, ran up to the servants' story, to summon Storrord to come down as quick as possible.

In a few moments Storrord stood before the young gentleman, his composed demeanour betraying no trace of the rapidity with which he had made his toilet.

Walter led the way into the breakfast-room, and signed to Storrord to shut the doors.

“You know what has happened?”

“ Yes, Sir.”

“ Goliath has disappeared.”

Storrord looked in no wise surprised.

“ Dr. Jacobs wants a bottle of Sir Ralph’s old cordial from Sicily for Miss Hartley, who is not well ; but the key of the wine-vault is not to be found.”

“ Mr. Goliath probably has it, Sir.”

“ I presume so ; but, meantime, we want to go down into the wine-cellar.”

“ You will find it difficult, Sir. Its opening is a secret.”

“ I thought perhaps you might know ?”

“ No, Sir ; I do not know. Sir Ralph had all the western end of the house shut up while it was being made ; the dining-room was the last left open.”

“ Was the butler’s pantry closed ?”

“ Yes, Sir ; but I think that was for a blind. There was no work done there, I am certain.”

“ Had you no idea where Goliath came from when he brought up the wine ?”

“ He always brought it up at night, Sir. It was one of Sir Ralph’s whims. The servants used to believe that Sir Ralph had treasure hidden there ; but I think it was only that he chose to have it so.”

“ Then you are ignorant of any way of getting down there ?”

“ Entirely, Sir.”

“ Do you know who the carpenter was who put up the door ?”

“ It was old Rickland, Sir.”

“ Where does he live ?”

“ He lives with his daughter at Stonefield.”

“ What is his daughter’s name ?”

“ Thurston, Sir ; Mrs. Thurston. She lives in a little house on the edge of the common. It is about five miles from here. Anyone in the village can tell you, Sir.”

Walter mounted again and took the road to Stonefield.

“ So Mr. Goliath is gone. It is a wonder he stayed so long,” said Storrord to himself.

He reflected a moment. "Singular that Dr. Jacobs should be so set on that particular cordial; —very singular. There's something to be found out there," he added, slowly rubbing his chin. "If I were there as I used to be I would soon have it."

Despite the urgent haste of the moment, despite the horror which lay before young Arden's mind, an unformed mass from which the next half hour might evoke a reality so direful that his imagination shrank from glancing at it; despite the natural compassion he felt for the sudden and violent death of the man who had stood between him and all that he had ever hoped for; despite the latent sensation of dread left on his mind by the unrepentant death-bed beside which he had so lately stood; despite all of these, there arose in the young man's soul, as he rode on in the fresh air, under the cloudless sky, a joy, a thankfulness, a gratitude, that would not be repressed. Edith was free. He sought to shut his ear to the words, to turn away his mind from following out their meaning.

Surely this was no moment for rejoicing. But stronger than compassion, and anxiety, and ruth, returned the voice, with its exultant burden,—Edith is free.

“What news?” asked Dr. Jacobs, as an hour and a half after his departure, Walter dismounted at the Park.

“Unsatisfactory; yet I have learned something. Storrord knew nothing. The old carpenter has almost lost his mind, and refused to tell; but from what he muttered to himself afterwards I think the door must be in the dancing-room, under one of the mirrors. The gilding may be a little different at the place.”

Dr. Jacobs pursed up his lips; the information was more vague than suited him. Time was wearing on.

“I have found out that Goliath took the express down train from Rustiton, yesterday.”

“Where can he have gone?”

“Probably to Liverpool. If so, he is off by this time. Vessels are leaving by every tide.”

They took their way to the dancing-room, opened the closed shutters, and renewed their search. The sounds drew them again to the southern wall. They examined carefully the gilded frames of the mirrors placed there, but their scrutiny remained fruitless. The length of time that had elapsed, since the alteration, had effaced any difference that might once have existed.

“We can sound the frame work,” said Walter. “Our ears may serve us better than our eyes.”

They tapped cautiously in turn around each gilded frame. As they tested the third from the library, instead of the dull, muffled sound of plaster, it gave forth the clear resonance of wood. Possibly a spring might be hidden beneath. True they had looked there before, but still it might have escaped them. Walter passed his hand along, one of the iron clamps supporting the mirror moved slightly beneath his touch. He pressed forcibly upon it. It yielded, the mirror

swung slowly forward and showed a narrow door, fast locked.

They looked at one another in perplexity. It was impossible to wait. The door must be opened without delay. They must assume the pretext of opening some other lock, some cupboard in the library and send for a locksmith directly.

A groom was dismissed to Wodeton in haste, and Walter and Dr. Jacobs sat down to the breakfast that had been prepared for them. The meal was but a pretence. Walter rose from the table and walked up and down the room. As he neared the window his attention was attracted by the armorial bearing on the central pane,—the mailed hand grasping the blood-red rose. He stopped and gazed earnestly at it.

“Would not one be tempted to refer all this to fatality?” he said, pointing it out to his companion. “Look at that.”

“There is no fatality,” answered the old physician. “What we call fatality is the inexorable logic which binds effect to cause, the

working of the great law of transmission. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children only because the children have received by descent the passions which led the fathers into sin. The unscrupulous violence of the founder of the house, to which the device plainly points, has been inherited by Sir Ralph. It works now as it did then,—that is all the fatality.”

Walter’s attention had wandered from his companion’s reply to the figure of a poorly-dressed youth who was coming up a side path which led across the lawn to the house. He carried a small brown paper parcel in his hand. Walter opened the glass door and went to meet him.

“What is it that you want?” he asked.

“I comes from Rustiton, Sir,” he replied, “and I brings this for the young lady at Ilton Park.”

“Who sent it?”

“A great black man, Sir. He gave me half-a-crown to bring it here at nine o’clock to-day. It’s just that now, Sir.”

Walter took the parcel eagerly.

“ I will see that it is rightly delivered,” he said, and dismissed the lad.

It was the key. Within the outer covering was a slip of paper with a few words to Isabel:—

“ The third mirror on the left from the library in the dancing-room—press on the middle clamp beneath.”

“ Black devil as he is, it seems he didn’t want him to starve,” said Dr. Jacobs, as throwing down the paper, and starting to his feet.

They locked all the doors of communication with the rest of the house, and adjusted the key to its place. The door opened. A damp chill crept outward, and waved the flame of the candle in Walter’s hand. They descended the steep and narrow stairs. There were many of them. At their foot was a second door. They pushed it, it opened, and they entered a small, round vault. The candle burned dimly in the foul, mephitic air, and illumined but faintly the arched recesses around, showing imperfectly the rows of bottles

ranged in order on every side. Nothing else was visible at first. They made the tour of the vault, throwing the faint light of the candle into each recess in turn. All at once they paused abruptly. The rays were reflected from two eyes gleaming up out of the darkness at the extremity of one of the recesses. An exclamation broke from Walter's lips. He was springing forward when Dr. Jacobs caught him forcibly by the arm.

“Take care—he may be dangerous. Let me go first.”

They approached cautiously.

On the ground before them, chained to the wall, crouched the figure of what was apparently a very old man. His long and matted hair and beard were of a yellowish white, his skin was of a greyish hue. He was clothed in what seemed the rags of a gentleman's dinner dress. He did not look at them as they advanced towards him. His whole attention seemed absorbed by the light in Walter's hand. Young Arden placed it on

the ground, and with the physician knelt beside him. They spoke to him. He did not answer. He looked only at the light. They touched him. He paid no heed, but slowly and with a vacillating motion reached out his hand towards the faint and sickly ray. They sought in vain to obtain some recognition of their presence from him. He heeded nothing but the light.

“It is as I thought, or worse than I thought,” said Dr. Jacobs, with a groan, at length abandoning his fruitless efforts.

“He is an idiot?” said Walter, in a low voice.

“Yes. And now for God’s sake let us get him up.”

The chain was fastened to a strong staple in the wall by a heavy padlock.

“The housekeeper will have keys,” said Walter ; and he sprang up the dark stone stairs.

In a few moments he returned with several bunches of keys. One was found to fit the rusty lock. The chain fell clattering. Sir Ralph was free ;—but still he sat passive, gazing at the light.

They raised him to his feet. His joints refused to support him. He sank upon his knees.

Exerting all his strength, Walter, aided by Dr. Jacobs, bore him up from his prison. As he emerged into the light of day he writhed and closed his eyes, muttering unintelligibly.

They carried him into the library, laid him on the sofa, and drew the window curtains so as to make twilight in the room.

They had but just accomplished this, when the sound of carriage wheels was heard from the avenue. Walter went out. Early as it was, Isabel had come to sit beside her mother. Walter drew back Mrs. Arden, in a few whispered words informed her of the discovery, and impressed upon her mind the necessity of its being kept secret from Isabel for the present. Mrs. Arden, bewildered by horror as she was, promised, and faithfully kept her word.

The news of the accident of the day before spread fast. Before mid-day the Park was

besieged with visitors : every house in the neighbourhood had heard the astounding story that Sir Ralph Tremyss had been found immured in his own wine vault, where he had been kept imprisoned by Goliath ever since his supposed death three years before. Old friends and acquaintance came pouring in to express their horror and grief. Only one or two were admitted by Dr. Jacobs into the room where Sir Ralph lay. These stood beside him with awe-struck faces, and gazed upon that grey and shrunken visage and skeleton form, and sought in vain to awaken some responsive sign of intelligence ; then retired with careful tread and hushed voices to confer in the adjoining rooms on this frightful disclosure, and on the atrocious guilt of Goliath towards Sir Ralph and Lady Tremyss.

No voice came to proclaim her guilt. Safe in her shroud she lay, while those among whom she had lived so long, spoke her panegyric, and mourned her wrongs.

Towards evening Mrs. Arden summoned Wal-

ter. He found her waiting for him in the gallery outside the door of the chamber where Lady Tremyss lay. She looked harassed and wearied.

“Walter,” she said, “I wish you would come in and speak to Isabel. I don’t know what to make of her, I really don’t; she is quite different from what she was last night,—so still that she frightens one. I can’t get her away from her mother. She is sitting on the floor beside the bed, and won’t get up nor answer when I speak to her. Do come in.”

She opened the door. Walter stood on the threshold, and gazed within. The shutters were partially closed; the dim light fell from the upper part of the windows only, resting with a lifeless quiet upon the purple draperies and furniture of the room. On a canopied bed, beneath shrouding folds of finest linen, lay a stirless form. Beside it, on the floor, sat Isabel, her arms clasped around her knees, her eyes gazing steadily before her, motionless, as if carved in monumental stone. Mrs. Arden advanced, and

spoke to her. Isabel made no reply. Mrs. Arden beckoned to Walter with an imploring air. He came nearer, and stood looking on the girl, locked up from all human sympathy as she seemed, in her dumb sorrow. She did not look up,—she did not appear to notice his presence. He bent over her.

“ Isabel—”

She stirred slightly, but did not raise her head.

“ Isabel, it grieves me to see you.” The tenderness of an infinite pity was in the young man’s voice. “ Won’t you go back with my aunt to the Hall?”

Isabel was silent.

“ Won’t you come?”

He laid his hand upon hers.

“ I cannot leave her,” Isabel replied slowly.

“ But if I promise to remain here? She shall not be left to the care of servants. I promise you that I will not leave the house as long as she is here. Will that content you?”

Isabel rose to her feet.

“Go,” she said.

Mrs. Arden looked hesitatingly at Walter. He silently led the way from the room. They stood without. For a while they heard nothing, then came a low wailing sound, so plaintive that it forced the tears to Walter's eyes, and Mrs. Arden dried a trickling moisture on her cheeks. The wail died away, and again there was silence. Then Isabel opened the door, came out, and passing by them, without turning her head, descended the staircase, and left the house.

“She looks like her mother,” whispered Mrs. Arden, as she followed with Walter.

“God forbid,” he replied.

CHAPTER XII.

THE next morning Lord Prudhoe, the heir-at-law, arrived. On the preceding day a keeper, a quiet-looking man, with broad shoulders and watchful eyes, had been summoned from Harrowby Retreat, to assume the temporary charge of Sir Ralph until ulterior measures could be taken as to his disposition. When Lord Prudhoe was introduced into the room in which his kinsman was, he found Sir Ralph shaved and dressed. To the eyes of those who had seen him on the preceding day, the removal of the matted locks and beard which had then partially concealed his features, served but to make his emaciation still more apparent. He was sitting in an easy chair, his eyes fixed with a dull, meaningless stare upon

the ray of sunlight which made its way through the closed curtains. The attendant had placed him where the beam fell near him. At intervals he would feebly extend his hand, as if to grasp it; but soon let his arm fall again, as if wearied by the effort.

Lord Prudhoe stood a while gazing at the miserable, mournful sight; then drew back with Dr. Jacobs to the other side of the room.

“Is there no hope of his recovery?”

The physician shook his head.

“But surely, with care and attention, something might be done. Persons as reduced as that have got well before now.”

There was a tone almost of impatience in the young man's voice as he glanced at Sir Ralph. The spectacle was intolerable to his feelings.

“There *must* be hope,” he repeated.

“I don't say the physical debility couldn't be combated if there were sufficient vitality in the brain; but, as it is, there is nothing to take hold of. The nervous system is destroyed.”

“ If he could but live, if it were only to enjoy the animal comforts of light and warmth, and proper food and shelter, it would be something,” said the young man regretfully.

Dr. Jacobs beckoned to the attendant.

“ How long can he last, do you think ?”

“ A few weeks, more or less, Sir.”

“ No more? Say what you think.”

“ Not unless there’s a miracle to help him, Sir. He hasn’t any pulse to speak of. He’ll grow weaker and weaker, and fainter and fainter every day, and go out at last as you snuff out a candle.”

And the man returned to his seat beside the white-haired skeleton form.

“ You see,” said Dr. Jacobs.

And with a sorrowful gesture of assent, Lord Prudhoe followed the physician from the room.

As the door closed behind them, the young man stopped, and turned round abruptly.

“ Is there any chance of getting hold of that

villain, do you think? I'd give a thousand pounds to-morrow to see him hung."

Lord Prudhoe's well-founded doctrine of sin being the result of ignorance, was for the moment lost sight of in the uprising of his wrathful indignation against the offender,

"If he's in England he'll scarcely escape. Five hundred pounds are offered for his apprehension."

"It shall be doubled," said Lord Prudhoe. "It's not only the barbarous nature of the crime," he continued, as they proceeded along the corridor, "it is its utter disproportion to the offence for which it was inflicted. Had Sir Ralph murdered his dearest friend he could not have extorted a more horrible retribution."

And Lord Prudhoe, after having been introduced into the room where Lady Tremyss lay, and contemplating in compassionate silence the remains of the wife of his kinsman, withdrew to a conference with Mr. Marsh, one of Lady Tremyss' trustees.

Lady Tremyss had left no will. Her dower,

which had remained untouched to accumulate since her marriage, would make a comfortable provision for Isabel; though she would be, nevertheless, reduced from wealth to a modest competency, Sir Ralph's entire property at his demise falling, as it would do of course, to the heir-at-law.

Lord Prudhoe listened to these details with all the attention the case demanded, and remained plunged in thought when Mr. Marsh had concluded his statement.

“And a very fortunate thing for her, poor girl, that she has that to depend upon.”

“Very,” replied Lord Prudhoe, absently.

“She might have been left without a penny; such a pretty creature as she is, too;—poor child, poor child.” And Mr. Marsh blew his nose violently. “I hope I shan't have to tell her of the change in her prospects,” he added, as if struck by a sudden perception of something very disagreeable which lay in store for him.

“I don’t think anyone will be called on to say anything of the sort to her,” Lord Prudhoe returned quietly.

“No, not at present, of course; but then before long she must learn it, you know. It can’t be deferred for ever.”

Mr. Marsh shifted his position uneasily.

“Precisely—I intend it shall be deferred for ever,” said Lord Prudhoe, deliberately.

Mr. Marsh pushed up his spectacles and stared at him. Lord Prudhoe continued with the air of a man who has made up his mind what he is going to do and wishes no comments made upon it.

“I have no intention of taking possession of the unentailed property at Sir Ralph’s death, which I fear is to be expected before long. I shall at once execute a deed, making over to Miss Hartley my right of succession.”

Mr. Marsh continued to stare without reply at the young man for a moment; then he reached forward, and energetically shook his hand.

“ ’Pon my soul—I don’t know what to say. I feel quite—”

And Mr. Marsh stopped abruptly, without further explaining how he felt.

“ One thing I most particularly request,” said Lord Prudhoe, his colour rising a little. “ I am especially anxious that this arrangement should not be communicated to Miss Hartley. Most young ladies know but little about law matters, and I don’t think she will ask any questions that cannot be easily eluded.”

“ What! You don’t want her to know!” ejaculated Mr. Marsh. “ Give away an estate like that, and not be thanked for it!”

“ On no account,” returned Lord Prudhoe, with a tinge of hauteur. “ I must beg, as I say, that the most entire secrecy be preserved.”

“ Of course, of course, since you desire it,” responded Mr. Marsh; “ but really, it seems a pity—I can’t understand.”

Mr. Marsh’s want of comprehension in no manner affected Lord Prudhoe’s resolution; and

the deed was made out, witnessed, signed, sealed, and finally deposited in the hands of Isabel's lawyer, without his having in any wise modified his first announcement of his intentions.

CHAPTER XIII.

A COLD, sullen sky, a sobbing wind at intervals rising into a sough, then sweeping wildly away over the misty fields to the half-veiled hills beyond ; a slowly dropping rain, accompanied the funeral train that bore that which had been Lady Tremyss to the little church.

Within all was curtained and draped with black, as it had been thirteen years before, when her young husband had been borne there, followed by Sir Ralph, chief mourner at that untimely funeral ; as it had been ten years later, when all his friends and acquaintances had gathered together, a solemn crowd, to listen to the service for the dead, read for Sir Ralph himself, drowned,

as they all knew, at midnight within the river. And now again the ancient words were spoken, again the organ rolled forth its funereal tones, the chant of life and death and resurrection rose above the bowed heads of the silent throng, and Ignatia, Lady Tremyss, was lowered into the dark vault below.

The cold rain through which Lady Tremyss' funeral procession had passed, had not ceased to fall, when a carriage drew up late in the day before the gate of Ilton Park.

There was some little delay, then over that threshold which Sir Ralph in all the vigour of his manhood had last crossed at midnight, three years before, he was borne, a helpless, decrepit burden, unconscious of all around. A few gentlemen followed him from the house. They stood in silence while he was lifted into the carriage, nor did they turn until it had disappeared beneath the dripping pines of the dark avenue, on its

way to the Retreat, Sir Ralph's last resting-place before the grave.

The account of Sir Ralph's sequestration, coupled with the information that a reward of £500 was offered for the arrest of the butler, had reached every corner of Great Britain. Public excitement rose to its highest pitch. The nature of the crime, its long impunity, the frightful circumstance that the affectionate and devoted wife of the victim, for so Lady Tremyss was styled by universal consent, had actually lived in the same house in which her husband was enduring his long agony, without a suspicion of his existence; the very trust she reposed in the old servant of the family made the means of the accomplishment of such an appalling vengeance for a comparatively trifling injury; all these, added to the general sense of insecurity produced by the disclosure, kept the public mind in a ferment for days. The whole police force of Liverpool and the adjacent towns was on the alert. Goliath had been traced thither, but for some

time it was uncertain what had become of him. Every vessel which left the docks was searched, but in vain; the entire city was explored without effect. Two days passed. The reward was increased to £1000, but still no result followed. The criminal remained hidden, and no new clue was discovered which could afford even a supposition as to his retreat. The accident had taken place at about one. It had been immediately known at the Park. Goliath had saddled the fleetest horse in the stables, and had galloped off, saying that he was going for a physician. He had made his way to Rustiton, the nearest station where the express train stopped. The press had been so great at the moment of the departure of the train, that the man at the ticket office could not remember for what place the fugitive had taken his ticket; but it was made certain by other testimony that he had gone on to Liverpool, which he had reached after nightfall. The notice his colour, uncommon stature, and disfigurement would have inevitably attracted by daylight,

had been prevented by the darkness. Three or four persons only came forward, deposing to having seen him between eleven and twelve o'clock that night, skulking along the streets. Further than this nothing was elicited, and it became nearly certain that he had fled the country before the police had been set on his track. At length, after several weeks, public attention was reawakened by the intelligence that the black butler of Ilton Park, whose crimes were still fresh in the memory of all, had succeeded in making his way to Cape Town on board an Australasian steamer which had sailed early on the morning of the discovery. He had not remained in the settlement, but had been last heard of journeying towards the north. Among the Boers who came down about that time from the out-lying stations, there were one or two who, when questioned, spoke of having seen a black answering the description of Goliath. He had asked by signs for food, and having received it, had gone on his way, always towards the north.

So Goliath disappeared, finally and for ever.

One of young Arden's first cares after the discovery of Sir Ralph, had been to write to George to engage his secrecy as to his suspicions of Lady Tremyss' complicity in the crime. He depicted the injury to Miss Hartley should any hint of the real circumstances get abroad, and appealed to all George's better feelings to allow the secret of Lady Tremyss' guilt to rest with her in her tomb. Walter concluded by offering him the place left vacant by the retreat of his groom, and by promising to bring about his marriage with Letty as speedily as possible.

George's answer arrived the next day.

“SIR,

“I don't try to thank you; there isn't any words that can thank a gentleman fitly for what you have done, and more than that, what you say you will do for me. I didn't think anything could have made me give up my revenge.

It was like an only child to me, Sir. I carried it about with me all the day, and slept with it close to me at night. But since I read the letter you sent me it seems to have gone, and I give you my bounden word, Sir, never to speak of what I think and what I know to anyone on earth.

“I take the place you offer me, Sir, and if ever a gentleman is served to the utmost of a man’s ability it is as you will be served by

“Yours humbly to command,

“GEORGE HILL.”

CHAPTER XIV.

A FEW days after the funeral, Storrord made his appearance at the Hall, and desired to speak to Mr. Arden.

“ You behaved very handsomely to me the other day, Sir,” he said, speaking with that brevity which characterised his style of conversation. “ What has since occurred has taken away the reason I had for not saying any more than I then did ; and I have come to tell you that I am ready to answer any questions which you may wish to put.”

And Storrord stood in the attitude of a witness at the bar, who possesses the comfortable assurance that no matter how much what he is about

to say may damage other people, it will have no effect of an injurious nature upon his own interests.

“Then I suppose that your former refusal to reply arose solely from the fear that Lady Tremyss and Goliath might find it out?”

“Not Mr. Goliath, Sir. I never was afraid of a man in my life,” and Storrord raised his eyes and looked steadily at the young gentleman.

“It was my lady.”

“Had you any especial reason to fear Lady Tremyss.”

“One cannot live in the same house with persons without finding out something about them, Sir; and usually I do not find them difficult to understand, but I never could make out my lady, Sir. Sometimes I used to think she was of different flesh and blood from other people. I have seen her when there were thunderstorms, with her eyes shining and her nostrils spread, and a fierce look all over her. She seemed to love them, and the worse the storm was the

fiercer and gladder she seemed. And then she hadn't a human heart of pity in her. She was kind enough to animals; that little black horse of hers would follow her like a dog, and all the creatures on the place knew her; but she hated the sight of poor and sick people. She gave money, I know; but for all that she would not have cared if all the world had died of the plague, except Miss Hartley. She was fond enough of her. But I came to answer your questions, Sir," said Storrord, checking himself in his unaccustomed fluency of speech.

"I would rather that you should tell me in your own way what led you to suspect Lady Tremyss."

"It shall be as you choose, Sir. I said that I never understood my lady; further than that, I always mistrusted her. There was something in her eye and about her that looked to me more as if she belonged behind the bars of a cage than in a drawing-room. The very way she had of gliding about so that you

did not know anything till she was close upon you looking sideways at you, had something to scare one in it; and although my lady was always gentle spoken, and went to church regular, and no one ever had any cause to complain of her, I always felt as if some day something might come out. And the time came, Sir; and if I've never spoken about it before it is because I did not dare to. If my lady had known that I heard what I heard, and saw what I saw that night, I should have been a dead man before morning ”

He paused a moment as if, even now that he was safe from her revenge, he still felt a reluctance to divulge the secret he had kept so long. Walter silently waited for him to go on.

“It was the day that Sir Ralph threw the decanter at Mr. Goliath, and laid open his face, Sir. There was to be a great gentleman's dinner party that evening, and it was because of the key of the wine cellars being lost that it occurred. Sir Ralph had it in his pocket all the time, Sir. I was in the housekeeper's room when Mr.

Goliath came in and asked her to bind it up. There was a look about him that made me think that it was not going to end there. From being black he had turned of a greenish colour, what of his face was not covered with blood; and when he told the housekeeper, who was exclaiming at Sir Ralph, that his master had a good heart, and would feel sorry some day, I felt sure that he meant more than he said. Suspecting, as I always did, that Mr. Goliath had a clear guess as to how Captain Hartley got shot, and seeing how he looked, I fully expected that he would have something to say to my lady, and I kept one or the other of them well in view. It was my lady's practice every night to go, while Sir Ralph was over his wine, and sit an hour with Miss Hartley, while the servants were at their dinner, and I thought it most likely he would choose then. Miss Hartley's room was next to the picture gallery, that is, the door of her room was next that of the picture gallery; but inside is a smaller room that she used to study in, that had

no door on the gallery. It opened into Miss Hartley's room on one side, and into the picture gallery on the other ; but the door into the picture gallery was always kept locked. Mr. Goliath did not stir out of his room that day. I was in mine, which was near his, watching, a good part of the time. I did not go down to dinner, for I thought that would be the opportunity he would most likely choose. And when all the house was still, and the gentlemen were over their wine, and my lady had come up to sit with Miss Hartley, Mr. Goliath came out of his room. I waited a while, and then followed him. He went downstairs and along the gallery until he came to Miss Hartley's door. He knocked. After a moment I ventured to look down the gallery. No one was there. I knew he had gone in. I went another way through the old part of the house, round to the picture gallery, opened the door so as to make no noise, and went up the room. It was a moonlight night, as bright as day. I went very softly to the door that led into Miss Hartley's

study and listened. I heard Mr. Goliath. I heard him tell my lady that Sir Ralph had killed Captain Hartley. She did not answer a word, but I could hear her pant. I looked through a crack in one of the old panels, and I saw my lady's face. She was standing full in the moonlight; she was so horrible to look on that I drew away my head after one glance and stole away as fast as I could. I did not feel safe till I was locked into my own room, and after I did fall asleep that night I kept starting awake with my lady's face before me. If I had dared, I would have left the house the next day, but I was afraid to do anything different from usual, for fear she would suspect me. I have blamed myself many a time afterward that I had not warned Sir Ralph; but I couldn't, Sir. If I had said anything about Captain Hartley, he might have turned on me, and he never would have believed a word against my lady."

"How was it that you had remained at the Park after what you knew of Sir Ralph?" asked

young Arden, putting a question that had several times occurred to him since his previous interview with Storrord.

“There were several reasons, Sir. If I were to say that it was an uncommonly good place, and that Sir Ralph was always a good master to me, whatever he may have been to others, I should be only saying the truth; but there was something more than that.” Storrord stopped for a moment. “You will find it strange, Sir, but I had a certain feeling for Sir Ralph. I pitied him. I knew what a miserable man he was. The thought of what he had done never left him. He did not dare, after that, to be alone in the dark. He never looked my lady in the face. He never laughed again as he had laughed before. If ever a man did penance for a sin, Sir Ralph did penance for his. And I believe, Sir, that if he could have brought Captain Hartley back to life by giving up his own, he’d have been glad to do it. That is why I stayed, Sir.”

Walter meditated a while.

“Did Miss Hartley never mention her mother’s having seen Goliath on that occasion?”

“No danger of that, Sir. The door was shut. All she knew was that they were talking together, and Miss Hartley was never so happy as when she had a secret to keep, or when she could hide herself away where nobody knew what had become of her. She was the pleasantest young lady and the kindest-hearted in all the world, but she had something in her like my lady for all that. Not that I mean any harm; I only mean that she was secret by nature.”

“Then when the event occurred, the whole household, yourself included, was entirely unprepared?”

“Entirely, Sir; and as to proofs that Sir Ralph had had foul play, there never were any, except that about the groom; and that couldn’t be called a proof, rightly speaking.”

“Did you ever hear anything said about the supposed cry of Sir Ralph’s ghost?”

“Yes, Sir, I supposed it was one of the dogs.

I never suspected that it was my master's voice. I never shall forget them as I saw them that night, Sir. There was a look in my lady's eyes that made one turn cold when I came down with the rest, and heard her give her directions about dragging the river ; and Mr. Goliath stood there all dripping with water, and his nostrils moving up and down, and his face with a strange swollen look, and his eyes all bloodshot. There was no doubt in my mind then, Sir, that Mr. Goliath drowned Sir Ralph in the river, and my lady was consenting to it. I never dreamed how much worse things really were."

"If you will allow me to say it, Sir," added Storrord, as he was about to withdraw, "I was glad to hear of my lady's accident—the world seemed an unsafe place as long as she was in it."

CHAPTER XV.

LORD PRUDHOE'S previsions as to the depth of Isabel's ignorance with regard to legal matters were fully justified by the event. When Mr. Marsh and Mr. Lacy, whom she had chosen for her guardians, informed her that she would eventually come into possession of Ilton Park and the rest of Sir Ralph's unentailed property, she received the information without any inquiry, manifesting neither surprise nor relief. In fact, she had not once thought of money matters; she had thought of nothing but the loss of her mother.

Invitations came in upon Isabel from every side, for she was a universal favourite, and the

sympathy of the world around her was painfully interested in her behalf.

Mrs. Lacy and Lady Emily Marsh stood foremost among the claimants. Indeed, those two ladies had come to an amicable understanding, in virtue of which they were to share Isabel between them; but these arrangements were brought to an abrupt close by Isabel's requesting her guardians' permission to accept Edith's invitation to reside with her at Arden Court; and it was arranged that she should accompany Edith on her return, directly after the funeral.

The examination of Lady Tremyss' papers; undertaken by Walter and Doctor Jacobs, to whom Mr. Marsh and Mr. Lacy were glad to depute the task, brought to light no document or paper bearing any reference to her early life. Either such had been carefully destroyed, or else they had never existed. Doubt and uncertainty

seemed but to settle the more closely over them as they pursued their investigation, and when they ceased from it, the eclipse that lay over Lady Tremyss' past was as impervious as before.

Convinced, at length, that no further disclosure was to be hoped for, Walter wrote to Mr. Daubenay informing him of the discovery of Mrs. Williams, and detailing her account of the manner in which the jewel came into her possession. He did not think it expedient to enlighten Mr. Daubenay as to the after history of Lady Tremyss, nor to describe the concealed anxiety with which she had recognised his sketch of the ring. He dreaded to let in any light, however feeble, upon the dark mystery of her life, lest it should result in an exposure which might entail incalculable evils upon her unconscious child.

A month had scarcely passed when the bell of the little church tolled out its warning heavily

again. Again his friends and acquaintances gathered together to hear the solemn words, no ghastly mockery now, with which the body of Sir Ralph Tremyss was committed to the tomb.

At the close of the ceremony, the mourners drew near while the coffin was being lowered into the vault, to be laid beside that of Lady Tremyss. Just as it reached its destined place, the cords swayed, and the coffin, escaping from the grasp of those who stood ready to receive it, slipped towards the other side of the vault. The men were about readjusting the cords to remove it from where it had rested, when they heard a voice from the opening above. It was young Arden's.

“Leave it there.”

They left it.

“I suppose the vault may as well be sealed up, Sir,” said the sexton to the clergyman, as the mourners dispersed. “Sir Ralph was the last of

the family ; it won't never be used again.—It was queer, Sir, wasn't it?" he added, lowering his voice. "It seemed as though he didn't want to lie near my lady."

CHAPTER XVI.

ALTHOUGH no sudden seizure, such as Edith had dreaded for him, had followed the shock Mr. Arden had received from the death of Mr. Averil; his health had, nevertheless, failed from that period. A long and wasting illness had assailed him on his return to Arden Court, and Edith's time and care had been fully occupied by her unwearying attendance upon him. Whatever indignation she might have felt at the discovery of his detention of Walter's letter, had yielded to filial solicitude. The deed was forgotten in her anxiety whilst his illness lasted, forgiven in her joy at his convalescence; tardy and protracted though that convalescence was. All her former affection had revived in full force.

What moments she could spare from her father's sick room she gave to Isabel, but they were few and far between. Perhaps it was better for Isabel that it was so. Left much to herself as she necessarily was, among scenes void of all sorrowful and weakening associations, the instinct which impelled her to seek solitude in her grief allowed full scope,—her health of mind, her native buoyancy began by degrees to return. Her affection for Walter had been rather an impulse of the imagination than an emotion of the heart. She had adored him more than she had loved him : the bond of sympathy had never riveted its links between them, and keen though her suffering had been at the perception of his indifference, it had not been so deep but that her grief for the loss of her mother had entirely supplanted it. She had mourned Lady Tremyss with a singular mixture of passionate self-abandonment when alone, and rigid self-control when exposed to the scrutiny of others ; but her attachment had been purely the result of instinct, coupled with

admiration, and like all instinctive emotions, though strong to violence in the first burst of its sorrow, it had no root of dolorous depth ; and when its object was wrenched away no irremediable void was left.

So when the first period of mourning was over, Isabel, though subdued and quieted, had attained to a more natural and peaceful frame of mind than had been hers for some months before. Her affection for Walter had calmed itself into friendship ; her anguish at the death of her mother had tempered itself into regret ; and when the summer time began to approach, it brought with it to her that sensation of hope and vague expectancy which makes so delicious that opening season to the young.

It was a morning in early May. The sunshine rested on all around.

Isabel sat on the top of the broad stone balustrade which bounded the southern side of the Italian garden, tranquilly enjoying the sun-

light, the air, the odours of the flowers. The last few months had changed her much, not in form or in feature, but in that which underlies form and feature. Her restless gaiety of glance, her flickering mirthfulness of expression, the out-breathing of impatient life that had once characterized her, were gone; the look of wistful sadness, of unquiet dejection that for a time had replaced them had vanished in like manner. Her clear brown eyes were soft and limpid, her curving lips rested peacefully on each other; her head was inclined slightly aside, as though the spring song of nature were audible to her outward ear. Isabel possessed, in common with those in whom the perceptive faculties are the most strongly marked, the rare and happy faculty of living in the present. The past and the future did not lie within the habitual scope of her vision, their shadow and their light were rarely projected across her path. The keen vitality of her sensations filled up the moments as they passed, and

left no dreamy void for imaginings to people. She had laid aside her former wilful ways. She no longer would stretch herself on the carpet, or sit drawn up like an Indian idol, as she used to do when Edith had first known her ; nor did any recurrence of her moods of stormy wildness come to disturb the tranquil current into which her life had settled. The first unquiet effervescence of the change from childhood to womanhood had passed, and had left Isabel with only so much of peculiarity remaining as gave piquancy to her converse and zest to her companionship.

As she still sat, Edith came down the walk. The little terrier which trotted by her side, and whose life was harassed and made miserable by the perpetually conflicting claims of his equal attachment for his two mistresses, sprang towards Isabel with a joyful bark, made an ambitious spring, intended to deposit him beside her on the top of the balustrade, and in his sudden excitement overleaped the mark and rolled over and over down the grassy slope beyond. Isabel laughed

aloud. The sound rang mirthfully, and called a responsive smile to Edith's lips. She had not heard Isabel laugh that way for so long, so very long a time. She must be happy, quite happy, else she would not have laughed so gaily.

"I am glad you have come," said Isabel.
"It is so pleasant here."

They sat silently a while.

"How full of thought everything looks," said Edith, at length. "I can't help feeling that they all understand each other, that the trees speak to the clouds, and that the daisies talk to the blades of grass."

"I dare say they do," returned Isabel, acquiescently; "but I never think of it. I like to sit and look about me, because the air is warm and everything is beautiful, and it makes me feel happy without knowing why."

"You looked so contented that I was almost unwilling to come lest I should disturb you," said Edith.

"No; you did not disturb me. Do you know,

it's very strange, but I don't love to be alone as I used to do. I like better to have some one near me to feel as I do how beautiful it is. It seems to make it still more beautiful."

"Then you don't want to climb trees and watch for deer any more?"

"I don't quite know that," replied Isabel, thoughtfully. "That is very pleasant too; but I am afraid I am too old. I should be ashamed if anyone caught me."

"I don't think you will find any deer to tempt you where we are going this afternoon," said Edith. "Papa has taken a fancy to drive as far as Wardistoun."

"Aren't you afraid it will tire him?"

"Sir Joseph thinks not. He wants to encourage him to make a little more exertion now that he is better."

The exertion seemed to do Mr. Arden good. He looked refreshed and reinvigorated, and chatted pleasantly as they drove along. At length Wardistoun, the point of their drive, was

reached, and Mr. Arden unwillingly gave the order "Home."

The carriage was passing the gates when another equipage, escorted by a young man on horseback, rolled out of the avenue. Edith's head was turned away. She was pointing out something on the other side of the road to her father.

"I wonder who that lady was," said Isabel, as they drove on. "The one on this side. She had the strangest face, but something nice in it. I think she must have known you, for she spoke eagerly to the gentleman on horseback as she passed, and they both looked back at the carriage."

"I know so few people. I don't think she could have been looking at me," replied Edith.

"What sort of young man was it?" inquired Mr. Arden.

"He was rather pale, with sandy hair, and a very intelligent face. His horse was a beauty."

But the description was too vague to found

any conjecture upon, until that evening brought Madame Wosocki and her husband to Arden Court.

“I am not long at Wardistoun before I come to see you,” said the Russian, kissing Edith on either cheek in foreign fashion. “The prince will tell you how impatient I have been.”

“This is the pleasure my wife has most anticipated on her way to London,” asseverated the old gentleman, “and in it I much sympathise.”

And he gallantly raised Edith’s hand to his lips. Mr. Arden next received his share of amiable words, and then Edith presented her friend.

“You need not say the name; I know it already. It is Miss Hartley I have the pleasure to meet,” said Madame Wosocki, as she turned her light blueish grey eyes on Isabel. “You did not see us driving to-day, but we saw you.”

“It was the Princess that we passed,” said Isabel, as Edith looked perplexed.

“Nor did you see the young man who had just joined us.”

“No.”

“And yet it was a very good friend of yours,” remarked Madame Wosocki, with a half smile.

“It was Lord Prudhoe.”

“I am glad to hear of him,” said Edith earnestly. “Pray tell me something about him.”

“That which I remember best at this moment is that he much desires to present himself at Arden Court, and I promised to obtain your permission that he should come.”

“I shall always be glad to see him,” answered Edith in her truthful voice. “I count him among my friends.”

“You do well—he is un jeune homme comme il y en a peu,” said Princess Wara, with emphasis. “I do not know a nobler character. But we have spoken of him before.”

She paused and turned her eyes around the room. They rested first upon Isabel, who had retired to a little distance, then upon Mr. Arden as he sat conversing with the Prince.

“ You find papa much changed, I fear,” said Edith.

“ Yes ; he is not looking well, but I think I see that he is growing better and not worse. His eye is clear, though not so bright ; and the tone of his colour is healthy, though much paler than before.”

“ I feared so much that the event of which you have heard would bring on another attack like that at Albansea,” said Edith. “ I feel that I can’t be grateful enough that his illness took a different form.”

“ You thought then his attack at Albansea came from some sudden grief.”

“ Yes.”

“ Did you ever know what it was ? ” asked the Princess, fixing her eyes on her companion’s face.

“ I fear I do,” she answered reluctantly.

“ You surprise me. Do young English ladies discover secrets of state ? ” said Madame Wosocki meaningly.

Edith looked up inquiringly.

“ I think you are mistaken. It was no secret of state.”

The Russian sank her voice.

“ You know that we are aware of many things that we do not tell. I can assure you that the Greek loan was in danger at that time. I have a friend in a position to know.”

“ Are you sure? If I could only think it was that !”

She spoke hurriedly. Her eyes filled with tears. It was the one great trouble of her life, the fear that she had been the involuntary cause of her father's illness.

“ I can assure you that the Russian embassy in London received despatches announcing the probable success of the measures taken to make fail the Greek loan, on the very day that your father was taken ill at Albansea. He was the chief negotiator, you know. Its failure would have ruined him.”

“ But I wrote to the head clerk, and he said all was safe.”

“Bankers do not tell their secrets to their clerks any more than ambassadors do to their secretaries, *ma mignonne*. You may depend upon what I tell you, and disquiet yourself no more.”

She took Edith's hand in hers and patted it caressingly.

“You do not know how glad I am to hear this,” said Edith, after a pause of mingled emotions.

“Yes; I know. It is for that I tell you,” replied Madame Wosocki.—“It is for that I have worked so hard to find this out,” she might have said, but did not.

Then, as if to change the subject, “How very striking a face has your friend. Lord Prudhoe was greatly impressed. It seems he had never seen her before.”

“No; they have never met, yet they are connections.”

“I did not know that. He did not say so.”

“He was the nearest relative of her stepfather, Sir Ralph Tremyss.”

“Yes; I know,” replied Madame Wosocki,

who obviously did not intend to make any allusion to recent events. Her imagination had been strongly impressed by the coincidence of Averil's death following so closely upon her prophecy. She did not like to speak of him.

“And now do you know what I must do? I must bid you adieu. The Prince brought me here on the promise that I would stay but half an hour.”

“But not adieu for a long time,” replied Edith. “I shall come to see you.”

Madame Wosocki smiled sadly.

“It would be too long a journey, *ma mignonne*. We return to Russia. Our two years' *cong e* has expired. We leave to-morrow. I must say farewell.—Adieu, *sois heureuse*; *tu le seras*, *je le vois*, *il est  crit dans tes yeux*. *Je l'ai bien dit*, *le malheur n' tait pas pour toi*.”

Princess Wara pressed Edith in her arms, took courteous leave of Mr. Arden and Isabel, and vanished from the room, to re-appear no more.

The next day Lord Prudhoe arrived. Enlightened as he had been by Madame Wosocki as to the causes which had induced Edith's acceptance of Mr. Averil, she had risen higher than ever in his esteem ; for like many men of elevated nature, he over valued self-sacrifice, and was inclined to set an exorbitant value upon all voluntarily inflicted renunciations, trials, and privations. Accordingly he met Edith more with the air of a devotee revering a saint than that of a gentleman finding himself again in the presence of the woman he had hoped to marry, but a few weeks before.

Isabel was in the room when he was announced. She had as yet maintained the strictest seclusion, and seen no morning visitors ; but so closely did he follow on the servant's steps that she had no time to make good her escape. She sat with heightened colour and eyes cast down on her work, unconscious of the glances of interest Lord Prudhoe directed towards her in the intervals of his conversation with Edith. It appeared quite

unlikely that she would look up or speak to him at all, when a summons came for Edith from Mr. Arden's room.—There was no help for it—if Edith went, and Lord Prudhoe wouldn't go, she must do her best to entertain him.—

As she raised her eyes to him, she met an expression so gentle, so solicitous, so respectful, as to strike and rouse her attention at once.—He was not a handsome man, that was certain; but what a pleasant face he had.—Isabel felt quite at ease with him at once, blindly recognizing the sympathy which was swelling high within Lord Prudhoe, sympathy not a little heightened by the picturesque face and graceful form of its object.

When Edith returned, to her great satisfaction she found Lord Prudhoe established near Isabel's work-table, deep in what appeared a very interesting conversation.

“That's a nice man,” said Isabel when he was gone. “I like him.”

Lord Prudhoe's succeeding visits in no wise

appeared to diminish the favourable impression left by the first. Edith could not wonder that Isabel found him delightful. In fact, Lord Prudhoe had never appeared to so much advantage before. The gratification of feeling that he had conferred so great a benefit upon the unconscious girl, the compassion he felt for her orphaned state, added to the admiration inspired by her beauty and the sympathy he soon felt for her fresh and original nature, all made it very pleasant to be near her; and that pleasure tempered his voice, softened his irregular features, and communicated a glow and warmth to every sentiment that he expressed. Moreover, he was the only gentleman whom Isabel consented to see, and so he had the field all to himself.

Edith watched with daily increasing interest the unfolding of this new attachment. She had never discovered the existence of Isabel's short-lived affection for Walter. Her own nature was cast in such a mould of steadfastness that she

would have thought it simply impossible for a second attachment to rise so quickly from the ashes of a first. Moreover, it is extremely improbable that she would have approved of the possibility, could it have been proved to her to exist. But no such misgivings came to perplex her mind, and she beheld with unmingled satisfaction the rise and progress of the mutual liking between Isabel and Lord Prudhoe, undisturbed as it was by any of those petty gossipings and small contretemps which are so apt to ruffle the content of those whose affections flow through less secluded channels.

On one occasion only did Isabel fancy that she had occasion to find fault with Lord Prudhoe, and Lord Prudhoe feel inclined to remonstrate with Isabel.

It was a pleasant morning, fresh, sunny, and clear. Isabel sat in the window reading a new novel, "Edgar Morton's Inheritance." She had got as far as the middle of the first volume, and

was much interested in the story. Lord Prudhoe came in. She laid the book down and had soon forgotten it.

“You have been reading, I see,” said Lord Prudhoe after a while, and he carelessly took up the volume. As his eye rested on the title he changed countenance.

“I hope you are not reading this book,” he said, bending an earnest look upon her.

“Yes, I am. Isn't it a nice book? The opening is very interesting.”

“It is a book that I should be very sorry to have you read,” he answered gravely.

Isabel flushed.

“Mrs. Marston told me to read it. She said she liked it. I should think she might know.”

Mrs. Marston was one of the most Puritanic of women. To ascribe any undue laxity of principle to her was an obvious absurdity. Lord Prudhoe flushed in his turn as he answered,

“Certainly—nevertheless I hope you will not read the book.”

He spoke in a tone so serious that it bordered on severity, at least so Isabel thought. She felt not unreasonable displeasure at what seemed an unaccountable and unjustifiable interference. But as she looked at him she met an imploring look that tempered her vexation.

“Will you tell me why?”

“I cannot,” he replied firmly, looking away.

Isabel drew back into her chair and compressed her lips.—What was the matter with the man? What did he mean?—

But as she sat silent and vexed, a sudden revulsion took place in her mind. Her faith in her companion all at once reasserted itself.—What a baby she was. What did she care about the book.—And without saying a word Isabel jumped up and put the volume into the fire.

“Thank you,” said Lord Prudhoe as she returned to her place; and he looked so grateful that she felt quite ashamed of having been so unwilling to grant his request.

The incident, happily as it had passed, seemed

nevertheless to interfere with Lord Prudhoe's usual fluency. He conversed with a certain constraint, and soon took his leave.

He had not been gone long when Edith came in looking much discomposed. She had been finishing the second volume of "Edgar Morton's Inheritance."

"Oh, Isabel, please don't read that book," and she gazed anxiously around for it.

"That's strange," said Isabel, "Lord Prudhoe has just been saying the same thing."

"He's quite right," said Edith. "I hope you're not going to finish it."

"I couldn't if I wanted to," said Isabel. "There it is," pointing to the blackened mass in the fire.

Edith, who had been made acquainted by Walter with Lord Prudhoe's deed of gift, retired with a look of satisfaction. There was a great deal of information concerning the laws which regulated the descent of property, to be derived from "Edgar Morton's Inheritance."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE chill blasts and infrequent sunshine, the capricious showers and tardy frosts of early spring were passed. The rejoicing hum of insect life, the breath of wild flowers, the perfume of leafy trees, were all abroad. The summer time had come, redolent of beauty, bounteous of life.

Mr. Arden sat with Edith, and gazed forth over the garden. The sun had set; the sky was of that soft, opaline purple beside which the deepest blue looks cold; on the edge, where the golden glory of the sunset faded into the deeper hue above, hung trembling one solitary star. The evening breeze waved the tops of the encircling elms, and wafted towards the house the

heavy fragrance of the flowers from the garden. The song of the field cricket alone broke the stillness, with its shrill, familiar sound.

Edith leaned her head upon her father's chair, and looked upward. They sat some time without speaking. In his days of youth and vigour, Mr. Arden had cared little for such scenes. He was beginning to love them now.

"Where is Isabel?" he asked, at length. His voice had lost its former roundness; it was feebler than of yore.

"In the drawing-room, Papa, with Lord Prudhoe."

"He is often here."

"Yes, he comes often."

"I used to think, when we were at Albansea, that he had a liking for you."

Edith was silent.

"How long ago it seems," continued Mr. Arpen. "How much has happened since then. It is hard to believe that it is but a few months."

He paused for a while, and watched the deep-

ening landscape and the brightening star. Again he spoke.

“And Lord Prudhoe, what brings him here so much?”

“I think to see Isabel. He was very much struck by her when he met her a few weeks ago; he has been here constantly ever since.”

“Does she like him?”

“She is always very reserved about what she feels, but I think she will like him in time. No one can see much of him without admiring and respecting him; and certainly that is the best foundation for love.”

“Yes, and he has other things too. He would be a good match for any girl.” Mr. Arden gave a half sigh. Presently he returned to the subject.

“You say everyone must respect and admire him, and that is the best beginning for love. Why did you not think so before?”

“I have always thought so, Papa.”

“Then why when he was so attentive at Albansea, did nothing come of it?”

Edith was silent for a moment. Her father was approaching the subject which she had lately been resolving to open to him.

“Papa, do you want me to talk freely to you, as I should to Mamma were she here?”

There was an earnestness, a pathos in Edith's voice that moved her father—that touched what was softest within him. He laid his hand upon hers.

“Yes, my dear; speak.” And yet, as Mr. Arden said the words, he felt an undefined consciousness that perhaps Edith might be going to say things he did not wish to hear.

“I have been long wanting to talk to you, but I have feared that you would be grieved and perhaps displeased at what I have to say; and you have not been strong since we returned from Houston Lacy, and I did not wish to vex you; but now I must speak to you and show you my whole heart.”

She paused. Her father made no reply.

“I want you to look back, Papa, and remember

when you were young, when you first knew Mamma. Did you love her?"

"I loved her as much as a woman could be loved," Mr. Arden answered slowly. "But why do you ask me that?"

"Would it have made you unhappy to have given her up, and married some one else?"

"No power on earth could have forced me to do so. But, Edith, you are talking strangely this evening."

"Listen a little while, Papa, and please answer me. Did mamma make you happy?"

"I was perfectly happy with her. No one could—" Mr. Arden's voice failed; he paused.

The love which his wife had inspired had been the deepest sentiment he had ever known, the leaven of that otherwise worldly heart.

"And now, Papa, looking back, you are glad you married her?"

"Glad, — I am thankful. She was my blessing."

"Then, Papa, if you had a son you would

think he did wisely to marry the woman he loved if she were like mamma?"

"Most certainly."

"But mamma was not of high rank, and she had no money."

Mr. Arden did not answer. Edith's voice grew deeper, more pleading.

"And, Papa, if I were to say to you, when I marry I want to marry some one whom I can love as you loved mamma, what should you answer me?"

There came no reply.

"Papa, when I engaged myself to Mr. Averil did you know why I did it?"

"Because you thought it best, my dear, I suppose," said Mr. Arden uneasily.

"I did it for your sake, Papa. I feared it was my refusal that had made you ill. I was willing to sacrifice my whole life to buy the chance of safety for you, Papa. I did it, though I knew I should be miserable as long as I lived."

"You were a good girl, Edith, a good girl."

“ I told Mr. Averil that I did not love him ; but that I would try to do so. I told him the truth so far, but I did not tell him the whole truth.”

“ Why, my dear, I think that was enough. What was it that you did not tell him ?”

“ I did not tell him that I loved some one else.”

Something very like compunction stirred within Mr. Arden. Edith's constant and tender care of him during these last months of illness had rendered her very dear to him.

“ But did you not tell me that you had no wish to marry anyone else ?” he asked.

“ Yes, Papa ; but I thought he did not care for me.”

“ Who is it that you are speaking of, Edith ? Tell me his name.”

Edith laid her cheek against her father's.

“ Papa, remember all you have been saying, remember how you loved mamma, and think that perhaps she is standing here by us, listening to

all we say. Think it is she who is speaking to you, that it is she who tells you it is Walter that I love and that loves me. We love each other as well as you and mamma loved so long ago."

Again there was silence. The moon had risen over the tree-tops, and poured her full-orbed radiance across the lawn and flower garden into the dark and shadowy room. All was silvery light without, all was dim within, save where the white rays rested on Mr. Arden's changed and pallid face, and on the slight figure nestling by his side. There was something in the moonlight which re-echoed the sense of Edith's words. On such a summer night as this, years ago, before his life had become the barren and worldly thing to which it changed, he had wooed his wife. Thick coming memories rose thronging around him, a sweet and placid smile beamed as from the grave upon him, a gentle voice sounded again within his heart; and as Edith nestled imploringly towards him, he drew her to him and wept.

Edith wrote to Walter that night,—

“ DEAR WALTER,

“ It was only yesterday that I wrote, asking you to have patience a little while longer, and to-night I write to say that you may come. Papa has given his consent.

“ I scarcely know how it was brought about. I have been dreading it so much, fearing that touching on the subject might agitate him, and make him ill again; but he led the way to it himself, and then when I told him all, he took me in his arms without a word and held me there a long time, and when he let me go he bade God bless me. I whispered, ‘And Walter? Papa,’ and he said, ‘And Walter.’

“ I could hardly have hoped for it once; but among the many changes that have taken place, Papa has very much altered. I feel that his affection for me is different from what it used to be, and that he will be contented in seeing me happy.

“ You will think it childish, but I cannot believe in my happiness until I see you. I have so lost the habit of being happy, that I cannot convince myself that all my pain is over, and that we are never to be separated any more.

“ EDITH.”

The reverie into which Edith had sunk after completing her letter, was broken by a light tap at the door of communication between her room and Isabel's. It opened at her response, and Isabel, in her white peignoir, came in.

“ I saw the light under your door, and as Félicie's chatter stopped an hour ago, I knew you were thinking instead of going to bed. May I come and think with you?”

She sat down on a low chair close to Edith, clasped her hands around her knees, and remained silent.

They were used to sit thus together, and at first Edith paid no heed to her companion beyond the welcoming smile and gesture that had greeted

her entrance, but as after a while her eye rested on Isabel's face, something in its expression arrested her attention.

“Tell me, Isabel, what is it you are thinking of?” she said softly.

Isabel turned her eyes slowly upon Edith.

“I am thinking how strange life is.” She paused a moment, then went on. “How strange it is that what we have longed and prayed for we may come to think nothing of, and what we have thought nothing of may grow to seem more than all the world to us.”

This had not been Edith's experience, and her answer tarried a moment on the way.

“Isn't that resignation? the accepting God's will for us?”

Isabel shook her head.

“No :—I think perhaps it is God's changing us so as to enable us to be happy in a way we never dreamed of.”

A troubled gladness spread over Isabel's face as she spoke. She looked appealingly an instant at

Edith, then hastily left her place, and knelt beside her, hiding her face on Edith's shoulder. Edith cast her arm around her, and waited for her to speak. At length the words came.

“Oh, Edith, I am so happy.”

Edith pressed an earnest kiss on Isabel's forehead, and waited for her to go on.

“It's only that he's too good for me.”

“I'm sure he doesn't think so,” Edith answered.

“No. I wish he did. It's dreadful to have him think me so perfect—but then—” she paused and resumed in a lower voice; “I don't think that if I were what he thinks me I could—” she stopped.

“Care for him any more?” Edith suggested.

“Yes.”

“I fancy that is the chief thing to his mind just now. And so he has spoken?”

“Yes—to-night.”

“And you told him?”

“I told him that Mr. Marsh and Mr. Lacy would answer.”

“No,—Isabel—you didn’t say that,” said Edith, laughing.

“Yes, I did, why shouldn’t I? It’s true. I can’t say anything that they don’t. Mr. Arden told me so,—and I knew it before.”

“But you know that they will say yes.”

“Oh, yes, of course;—but then, I was very glad you know to say it so as not to have to say anything else just then. I felt so frightened.”

“Yes, I can understand,” said Edith.

“I think Mamma would have been pleased, don’t you?” said Isabel, after another pause.

“Yes,” answered Edith. She did not care to dilate upon this theme.

“He never saw Mamma; I am so sorry.”

“Haven’t you any portrait of her that you can show him?” asked Edith, with an effort.

“No, Mamma would never be painted. Once Sir Ralph had a great painter down from London to take her portrait. She didn’t say anything, but she locked herself up in her room, and wouldn’t come out until he had gone away.”

Edith made no reply. She was not sorry to learn that there existed no likeness of Lady Tremyss.

“I suppose he will be here to-morrow,” she said, preferring to turn the conversation back to Lord Prudhoe.

“No ;—he is going to see Mr. Marsh and Mr. Lacy, and then he’s going to see his mother. He won’t be back for three days.”

Isabel spoke as if she rather enjoyed the prospect.

“That’s a long time,” said Edith.

“No it isn’t—it’s very short. I would rather he should stay away longer.”

“What, don’t you want to see him again?” asked Edith, in surprise.

“Yes—some time—but not now.”

And with this, to Edith, incomprehensible speech, Isabel kissed her, and retired to her own room there to reflect upon the strangeness of life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

By one of those singular revulsions of feeling which we see sometimes take place, reversing probability and defying explanation, Mr. Arden had no sooner given his consent to Edith's marriage, than he appeared inspired by the same interest with regard to it as if it had been a pet project of his own. He rapidly arrived at various comfortable conclusions concerning the new state of affairs.—It wasn't a bad thing that Edith was to marry a man who would not insist upon taking her into the world all the time, but who would be contented to let her stay in the evenings quietly at home with him—; for although the physicians had sedulously concealed from both

Mr. Arden and his daughter the precarious nature of his hold upon life, he felt, nevertheless, an internal conviction that he never again should be as strong as he had been ;—and of course Edith wouldn't think of leaving him while he didn't feel well. And then, after all, Edith's children would have Arden Hall. True, Walter Arden wasn't a great match for Edith, but Edith didn't care for great matches, and since she did care for him there was nothing to be done about it but to let her marry him. And she was a good girl ; very tender and affectionate she had been. He didn't know how he could have done without her during this illness. Yes, Edith was a good girl, and she should be happy her own way. —

And when Walter appeared on the evening of the day that he had received Edith's letter, and Mr. Arden, wasted and wan, shook him cordially by the hand, saying, "Make her happy," the young man's look and words were such as to infuse renewed satisfaction through Mr. Arden's

mind. For all Walter's hostile impressions disappeared at once before the sight of the change wrought in Edith's father by the last few weeks. He could not feel anything but sympathy and compassion for the altered and broken man. He did his best to amuse and interest him, and succeeded beyond what he could have hoped. His pleasant voice, his cheerful smile, his equable gaiety, soon grew necessary to Mr. Arden's comfort. He missed him in a hundred little ways when he was not there.—It was very annoying to have him all the time going away. It was so pleasant to look round in the evening as he sat in his easy chair, on those four cheerful faces;—for Lord Prudhoe, in right of being Isabel's accepted lover, had now taken his place in the family circle;—when Walter wasn't there it was quite a different thing. He didn't see why Edith shouldn't be married at once, and that would put a stop to these vexatious interruptions.—So Mr. Arden, before long, informed Edith and Walter;

and as no valid reason to the contrary appeared it was decided that they should be married at the end of the ensuing month.

This point was no sooner settled, than, much to Edith's disappointment, for she had hoped for a quiet wedding, Mr. Arden began to lay plans for a ceremony of state, to be followed by a breakfast that should surpass any breakfast that had ever been eaten before. She had some faint hopes that Sir Joseph might interfere and forbid it on account of the fatigue; but Sir Joseph did not take this view of the subject at all. He said that the amusement and occupation would be very good things for Mr. Arden; and as to the fatigue, if he were too tired on his return from church, he needn't go in to breakfast, that was all.

So Edith submitted resignedly; and Mr. Arden plunged forthwith into interviews and consultations with various leading authorities of the industrial world of *luxe*. This, together with the choosing the designs and inspecting the pro-

gress of the re-setting of her mother's diamonds, happily filled up Mr. Arden's time, and allowed the lovers much more liberty to be together than would otherwise have fallen to their share. And so the days passed, and brought them to within two weeks of the wedding.

Edith had resumed her drawing since Walter's appearance at the Court. She had not drawn before since she had left the Hall. It had been too painful to take up again an occupation so associated with past joys and pains; but now, with Walter beside her, how pleasant it was to sit and draw.

She was sitting at her drawing-table: Walter, who had dined on the preceding evening with Mr. Hungerford to meet the Abbé Hulot, had just placed upon it a fine photograph.

“Mr. Hungerford insisted on my taking it for you to copy. It will make a beautiful drawing if you leave out the foreground, which is bad.”

“The foregrounds in photographs are always ugly,” Edith commented.

“Just that tower, and the wall, and the waves, and clouds beyond, you see.”

“Yes, I see,” said Edith, looking at it attentively. “What a strong and peculiar character it has. How strange, and wild, and desolate. But you didn’t tell me— What is it?”

“Iona. They are going to make a tour among the Western Isles. They will touch there. The abbé wants to examine the ruins; he expects to find some valuable information for his second volume. You remember you read the first.”

“Yes, I remember,” replied Edith, still gazing at the photograph. “So they are going to Iona. I half envy them.”

“Would you like to go there,” asked Walter. “Then why can’t we take that for our wedding trip?”

“But Papa—would he be willing?” objected Edith. “I don’t think he will want me to go anywhere.”

“He spoke to me yesterday as if he expected it, and said he hoped we should not stay away

more than a fortnight. We can go on a yachting trip there if you like."

And Edith, who, like most fair-haired women, was fond of the sea, consented.

"I should not be sorry if we were to meet them," she said, after a while. "I want to see the abbé, and I would rather meet him for the first time among such scenes as this, than in a drawing-room; though I don't quite know what makes me feel so."

"A sense of the fitness of things," replied Walter. And he mentally resolved that, if possible, Edith's wish should be gratified; and that she should meet the abbé among the Isles, perhaps at Iona.

CHAPTER XIX.

FAR to the west, amid the sea-green waves of the Atlantic, rises a solitary isle, rich with the records, solemn with the memories of the past. Royal dust sleeps there its endless slumber, to the sound of the chanting of the unceasing waves. The white-winged sea fowl circle around its deserted fanes, wherein the ocean breezes are now the only choristers, whose priests have vanished centuries ago, whose rites long ages since have ceased to be. The small, scant grass grows green around the sepulchres of knight, and priest, and nun; and the purple heather and the yellow gorse gleam up from between the broken columns and shattered monuments that strew

the holy ground. Solitude eternal, unbroken, has claimed possession of the spot, and the still sunshine broods over it like silence visible.

Hither Walter and Edith had come. All the early hours of the day they had passed amid the ruins, watching the yellow sunshine, the soft, white clouds, the dark blue heavens, and the restless waves.

Edith turned her eye from the sunshine towards a tombstone which lay near her in the shade of the ruined wall : bending over it she began half absently to decipher the inscription—
“ Ignatia, Piora XII. Requiescat in pace.”

“ Ignatia—that was Lady Tremyss’ name,” she said, thoughtfully ; and her lips moved silently as though repeating the graven entreaty, “ Requiescat in pace.”

Walter had kept silence to Edith on the dark story of Lady Tremyss. He did not care that her pure eyes should rest on such a crime-stained life. He wished to guard her thoughts from all that might trouble and annoy ; he sought to sur-

round her mind with all that was peaceful, beautiful, and of good report. But despite his care, as he re-echoed her words, "Requiescat in pace," there was a tone in his voice that arrested his young wife's attention. She gazed up at his face, and saw upon it a shadow deeper than that which rested on the tombstone. She looked an enquiry, but Walter did not reply. His thoughts had wandered back over the past, his memory was busy with scenes gone by. Again that still presence passed before him, those long, black eyes flashed up on him from their tomb, that soft, low voice broke its dumb silence, and came whispering inarticulately upon his ear.

—"Was that mystery never to be solved?" he asked himself. "Was it to haunt him even to his grave? Had the waves of life closed over Lady Tremyss and her past so utterly that no floating fragment should ever come back to tell its tale at last, no clue whereby the light of day might make its way at length into the inscrutable recesses of that dark existence?"—

He was roused by Edith's light touch upon his arm.

“Look, Walter—a boat. It is they—they are coming.”

He rose and went down to the shore to meet and welcome the expected travellers. Edith retained her place, awaiting them.

She was still sitting in silence beside the tombstone when she heard the sound of approaching steps. Cordial voices echoed amid the ruins, friendly hands were outstretched, and Mr. Hungerford and Walter stood before her, accompanied by an old man clad in foreign ecclesiastical garb.

Introduction, congratulation, question, and reply were interchanged awhile, breaking the stillness with the unaccustomed tone and phrase of social life; then at Edith's request, Mr. Hungerford and the Abbé Hulot took their seats near her, and yielding by degrees to the influence of the place, the conversation changed its character and took a graver tone.

“I did not think when I undertook this pilgrimage that I should meet one so young, and I must believe so happy, in this distant and melancholy spot,” said the abbé, who had taken his place beside Edith in the shadow of the wall. “These emblems are scarcely fit for such as you,” he added, glancing around on broken cross, and shivered capital, and grey and sunken graves.

“I do not find it sad,” she answered. “I only find it tranquil. I like to hear the sound of the waves as they echo over the tombs.”

“What do they say to you?”

There was something in his expression that drew Edith's thoughts beyond their usual resting-place, her lips.

“They tell of what outlasts Time, and is beyond Space,” she replied, in a low voice; “of that Might, and that Glory, and that Love which we can never fully understand.”

As Edith paused, the mighty chorus of the waters took up her words, and repeated them in their deep acclaim.

“It is well,” responded the abbé, and was silent for a while; then again turning to her,—
“but does no painful memory, no more immediate association assert itself in presence of these graves? I am old. I have lost many of those whom I loved, and despite my faith, a churchyard is a melancholy place to me.”

“Scarcely,” Edith replied. “I never think of a grave when I am remembering those who are gone. I think only one name has occurred to me since I have been here, and that was suggested to me by this tombstone,” and she pointed out the inscription in the shadow.

“Ignatia,” repeated the abbé, reading from the ancient stone, “that is a favourite name of mine.”

“It has a strange sound to my ears,” replied Edith. “I have known only one person of that name.”

“Yes; it is especially used as a religious name among us. It is not an English name at all.”

“And yet it was an Englishwoman who bore it,” she remarked.

“Then probably an Englishwoman of our persuasion.”

“No. She belonged to the Church of England.”

“Who was that, may I ask?” inquired Mr. Hungerford from his place opposite.

“Lady Tremyss,” replied Walter, who had a certain dislike to Edith’s even speaking the name.

“Lady Tremyss,—Ah, yes, I remember, that strangely beautiful woman I saw for the first time at your house. By the way, I believe she died lately, did she not?”

“Yes,” answered Walter, and anxious to divert the conversation from its direction, he turned towards the abbé.

“Let me thank you anew for the pleasure I have had from the first volume of your book? I do not know when I have read anything that has interested me so much.”

The abbé shook his head with a sad smile.

“Ah,” he replied, “you refer to the great disappointment of my life.”

“How so?” inquired Walter. “It has been very much admired. At least, the reviews say so.”

“Yes,” added Mr. Hungerford, “three editions in as many months. It is a book which marks an era in that study.”

“Ah, all that is very well,” responded the abbé, “but, nevertheless, my own inestimable chance of testing my theory has been lost. Nothing will ever restore it to me. I can now never assert, I can only presume results.”

“May I ask what disappointment you mean?” asked Edith, sympathisingly. “Let us hope that it is not entirely beyond help.”

“You shall hear, madame, and then you will be able to judge what a blow it was to me.” He paused a moment, then continued, “I was already much interested in the subject, when I accidentally found among a tribe of the North-

West, a child who struck me forcibly. The region was remote, there was no evidence that it had ever been penetrated by any European until I myself ventured there; yet to my eye the child bore unmistakable evidence of European origin; in her physique solely, however, for she was as complete a little savage as I ever saw. But the tribe stoutly maintained that she belonged to them, and I was completely puzzled. When I go into a new tribe, I always secure the medicine-man for a friend, and to the medicine-man I went. He held the information very high; it cost me half my stock of quinine to purchase it. However, he finally was bought over, and informed me that the child was the daughter of two white persons who had come to live among the tribe, and who had died in its infancy. I asked if they had remained in the tribe willingly, but received no satisfactory answer.

“ The child was ignorant of its European descent, and believed itself an Indian. Here then was an unexampled opportunity, and I immediately set

myself to work to secure it. The point was this ; —everyone knows that any of the inferior races, when brought into contact with the Caucasian, instinctively recognise their inferiority ; and to this recognition many of the peculiarities observable in half-breeds and semi-barbarous nations are to be ascribed. Now if I could obtain that child of purely European blood and bring her up among Europeans, giving her a European education, but leaving her under the impression that she belonged to an inferior race, the nature and extent of the peculiarities she would evince would offer most precious indications for the solution of my great problem, as to how far early training and conviction can alter the tendencies of blood. I did my utmost, and finally the child was given into my custody. I had hard work to get her to her destination. She almost strangled me once during the night, and twice she threw herself out of the boat into the water. The boatmen could scarcely overtake her ; she swam and dived like an otter. At length I got her

safely into the city, and placed her in secure hands, as I thought, in a convent. Everyone believed she was an Indian, as she could speak nothing but the dialect of the tribe. I said that she came from a very distant region, and to that they attributed what differences they saw between her and the usual Indian. She was about twelve. I had intended to take her out of the convent in time, but as she grew older she showed such extraordinary ferocity of temper that I dared not let her loose. Sending her back to the tribe was not to be thought of."

"Why not?" Edith inquired.

"Her spiritual interest alone would have forbidden such a step; and moreover in that case I should have lost all that I hoped to gain, accordingly I decided that she must take the veil."

"But did she wish to do so?"

"It was the only thing to be done, *ma chère dame*. When we cage a tiger we do not ask whether the tiger likes it.—Her native violence and sullenness had been, I afterwards discovered,

much developed by the provocations she was constantly receiving from the novices, who, it seemed, were in the habit of taunting her with her Indian descent.—You look very much interested,” he observed, glancing at Edith’s look of commiserating pity, and Walter’s face of rapt attention.

“Yes; pray go on,” Walter replied, somewhat hurriedly. “What became of her?”

“There you touch on the very heart of my disappointment. She escaped from the convent and was never traced, despite all the exertions that were made. And it is not only in a merely scientific point of view that I so deplore her evasion. I am certain that she did not return among the Indians, she had become too far civilized for that. I feel that I was the involuntary cause of letting loose a scourge upon society. Her footsteps have been hidden from me; but this I can surely predict, wherever they have been pressed they have been marked with crime.”

“And was there no evidence of her parentage?”

Walter demanded, in a voice so peculiar that Edith turned and looked inquiringly at him.

“None, except you may call such what she wore as an amulet on a necklace of wild cat claws,—an old ring set with an orange coloured stone.”

“What is it, Walter; why do you look so strange?” exclaimed his wife, bending forward.

Arden hesitated to speak. He shrank irrepressibly from opening before his wife the blood-tainted page of whose long-sealed mystery he had but that moment discovered the key.

But Edith’s quick intuition needed no more. The questioning glance she darted back along the past, rested on a shrouded form.

“You knew her,” she exclaimed, fixing her eyes on Walter. “It must have been—it was Lady Tremyss!”

And again they heard the solemn sound of the waters, as, their long journey done, they broke

upon the shore; and as they rose, hushed and awe-struck to leave the place, again Edith's eye sought the tombstone, and again she murmured,
"Requiescat in pace."

THE END.

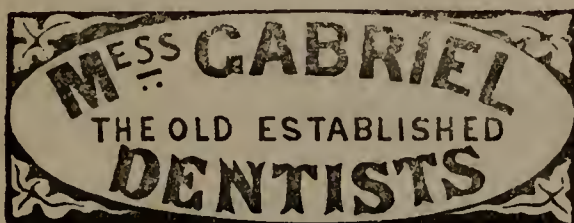


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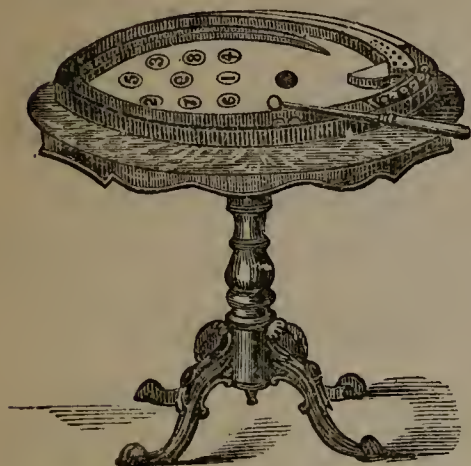
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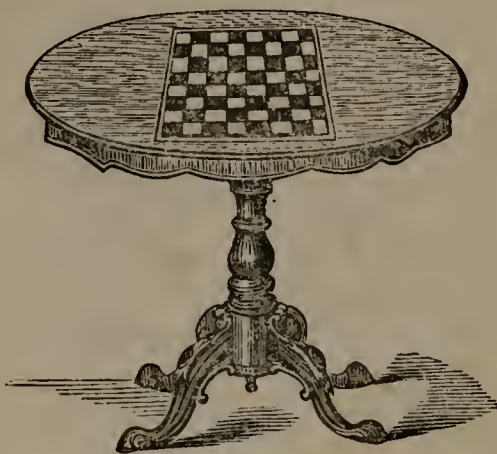
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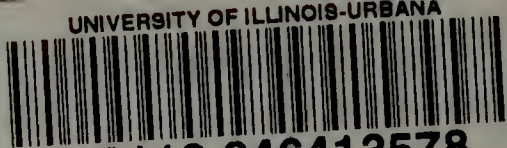
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