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# BLACK SHEEP.

A Novel.

BY

EDMUND YATES,

AUTHOR OF "KISSING THE ROD," "THE FORLORN HOPE," ETC.

"Love is strong as death ; jealousy is cruel as the grave."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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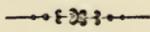
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# BLACK SHEEP.



## CHAPTER I.

### RECOGNITION.

WITH the unexpected return of George Dallas to London from Amsterdam, an occurrence against which so much precaution had been taken, and which had appeared to be so very improbable, a sense of discouragement and alarm had stolen over Stewart Routh. In the coarse bold sense of the term, he was a self-reliant man. He had no faith in anything higher or holier than luck and pluck; but, in those mundane gods, his faith was steadfast, and had been hitherto justified. On the whole, for an outcast (as he had been for some time, that time, too, so important in a man's life), he had not done badly; he had schemed success-

fully, and cunning and crime had availed him. He was a callous man by nature, of a base disposition; and, under any circumstances, would have been cool-headed and dogged. In the circumstances in which he found himself, his dogged cool-headedness was peculiarly useful and valuable. He had relied upon them without any doubt or misgiving until the day on which he was convinced by George Dallas's appearance on the stage, which he believed him to have abandoned for an indefinite time, that he had made a miscalculation. Then a slow cold fear began to creep over him. Had his luck—what marvellous luck it had been!—turned? Believers in such a creed as his are mostly superstitious fanatics. He had felt some such dread; then, from the moment when Harriet—Harriet, who should have seen that he had blundered: confound the woman, was *she* losing her head?—had told him, in her smooth encouraging way, that this new difficulty should be surmounted as the others had been. Not the smallest touch of repentance, not the lightest shadow of remorse, fell upon him with the stirring of this fact—only a hard, contemptuous

anger against himself and Harriet, and a bitter, scornful hatred for the young man who had been his tool for so long, and might now, in a moment, be turned into the agent of his punishment. When George Dallas left Harriet after the discussion which had terminated in his promise not to move in the matter of the identification of Deane, Stewart Routh, though he bore himself with calmness in his talk with his wife, had invariably writhed and raged under the galling sense of the first check he had received. If he could have done it safely, if the deed would not have been more fatal than the conjuncture he feared, he would have murdered Dallas readily; and he told himself so. He had none of the poetry, none of the drama of crime about him. He was not a man to kill one human being because it suited his purpose to do so, and then to hesitate about killing another, if a still more powerful preventive presented itself; he was incapable of the mixture of base and cruel motives, with the kind of sentimental heroics, with which the popular imagination endows criminals of the educated classes. He had all the cynicism of such individuals, cyni-

cism which is their strongest characteristic; but he had nothing even mock heroic in his composition. His hatred of George was mixed with the bitterest contempt. When he found the young man amenable beyond his expectations; when he found him unshaken in the convictions with which Harriet had contrived to inspire him and hardly requiring to be supported by his own arguments, his reassurance was inferior to his scorn.

“The fool, the wretched, contemptible idiot!” Routh said, as he looked round his dressing-room that night, and noted one by one the signs which would have betokened to a practised eye preparations for an abrupt departure, “it is hardly worth while to deceive him, and to rule such a creature. He was full of suspicion of me before he went away, and the first fruits of that pretty and affecting conversion of his, under the influence of his mother and the territorial decencies of Poynings, was what he flattered himself was a resolution to pay me off, and be free of me. He yields to my letter without the slightest difficulty, and comes here the moment he returns. He believes in Harriet as implicitly as ever; and if he

is not as fond of me as he was, he is quite as obedient." The cynical nature of the man showed itself in the impatient weariness with which he thought of his success, and in the levity with which he dismissed, or at least tried to dismiss, the subject from his mind. There was, however, one insuperable obstacle to his getting rid of it—his wife.

Harriet had miscalculated her strength; not the strength of her intellect, but that of her nerves, and the strain had told upon them. She still loved her husband with a desperate kind of love; but all its peace, all its strength, all its frankness—and even in the evil life they had always led it had possessed these qualities—had vanished. She loved him now with all the old intensity of passion, but with an element of fierceness added to it, with a horrid craving and fear, sometimes with a sudden repulsion, which she rebelled against as physical cowardice, causing her to shrink from him in the darkness, and to shut her ears from the sound of his breathing in his sleep. And then she would upbraid herself fiercely, and ask herself if she, who had given him

all her life and being, who had renounced for him—though she denied to herself that such renunciation was any sacrifice, for did she not love him, as happy women, the caressed of society, do not know how to love—home, name, kindred, and God, could possibly shrink from him now? She had not played any pretty little game of self-deception; she had not persuaded herself that he was other than he really was; she did not care, she loved *him*, just as he was, no better and no worse. She lived for him, she believed in, she desired, she asked no other life; and if a terrible anguish had come into that life latterly, that was her share of it, her fair share. It was not easy, for she was a woman and weak; her nerves would thrill sometimes, and phantoms swarm about her; sleeplessness would wear her down, and a spell be set upon her lips, under which they strove vainly to curve with their old smile, and to utter their old words of endearment and protestation; for she scorned and hated herself for such weakness, and could have torn her rebellious flesh with rage, that sometimes it would creep and turn cold when he touched her, or even when he only spoke. She

fought this false and dastardly weakness, as she called it, with steady bravery, and with the resolve to conquer, which is always half a moral battle; but she did not conquer it, she only quelled it for a little while. It returned on occasions, and then it tortured and appalled her even more than when the foe had been always in position.

All such conflicts of feeling had the effect of narrowing the sphere of her life, of concentrating her whole attention on, and intensifying her absorption in, her husband. A lassitude which her own good sense told her was dangerous began to take possession of her. They were better off now—she did not rightly know how, or how much, for she had gradually lapsed from her previous customary active overseering of Routh's affairs, and had been content to take money as he gave it, and expend it as he desired, skilfully and economically, but with an entire indifference, very different from the cheerful, sunny household thriftiness which had formerly been so marked a feature in their Bohemian life, and had testified, perhaps more strongly than any other of its character-

istics, to the utter deadness of the woman's conscience. His comforts were as scrupulously looked after as ever, and far more liberally provided for; but the tasteful care for her home, the indescribable something which had invested their life with the charm of a refinement contrasting strangely with its real degradation, had vanished. Harriet's manner was changed—changed to a quietude unnatural to her, and peculiarly unpleasant to Routh, who had had a scientific appreciation of the charm of steady, business-like, calm judgment and decision brought to bear on business matters; but discarded, at a moment's notice, for sparkling liveliness and a power of enjoyment which never passed the bounds of refinement in its demonstrativeness. "Eat, drink, and be merry" had been their rule of life in time that seemed strangely old to them both; and if the woman alone had sometimes remarked that the precept had a corollary, she did not care much about it. "To-morrow ye die" was an assurance which carried little terror to one absolutely without belief in a future life, and who, in this, had realised her sole desire, and lived every hour in the fulness of its realisa-

tion. Stewart Routh had never had the capacity, either of heart or of intellect, to comprehend his wife thoroughly; but he had loved her as much as he was capable of loving any one, in his own way, and the strength and duration of the feeling had been much increased by their perfect comradeship. His best aid in business, his shrewd, wise counsellor in difficulty, his good comrade in pleasure, his sole confidant—it must be remembered that there was no craving for respect on the one side, no possibility of rendering it, no power of missing it, on the other—and the most cherished wife of the most respectable and worthy member of society might have compared her position with that of Harriet with considerable disadvantage on many points.

Things were, however, changed of late, and Harriet had begun to feel, with something of the awfully helpless, feeble foreboding with which the victims of conscious madness foresee the approach of the foe, that there was some power, whose origin she did not know, whose nature she could not discern, undermining her, and conquering her unawares. Was it bodily illness? She had always

had unbroken health, and was slow to detect any approach of disease. She did not think it could be that, and conscience, remorse, the presence, the truth, of the supernatural components of human life, she disbelieved in; therefore she refused to take the possibility of their existence and their influence into consideration. She was no longer young, and she had suffered—yes, she had certainly suffered a very great deal; no one could love as she loved and not suffer, that was all. Time would do everything for her; things were going well; all risk was at an end, with the procuring of George's promise and the quieting of George's scruples (how feeble a nature his was, she thought, but without the acrid scorn a similar reflection had aroused in her husband's mind); and every week of time gained without the revival of any inquisition, was a century of presumptive safety. Yes, now she was very weak, and certainly not quite well; it was all owing to her sleeplessness. How could any one be well who did not get oblivion in the darkness? This would pass, and time would bring rest and peace. Wholly possessed by her love for her husband, she was

not conscious of the change in her manner towards him. She did not know that the strange repulsion she sometimes felt, and which she told herself was merely physical nervousness, had so told upon her, that she was absent and distant with him for the most part, and in the occasional spasmodic bursts of love which she yielded to showed such haunting and harrowing grief as sometimes nearly maddened him with anger, with disgust, with *ennui*—not with repentance, not with compassion—maddened him, not for her sake, but for his own.

The transition, effected by the aid of his intense selfishness, from his former state of feeling towards Harriet, to one which required only the intervention of any active cause to become hatred, was not a difficult matter to a man like Routh. Having lost all her former charm, and much of her previous usefulness, she soon became to him a disagreeable reminder. Something more than that—the mental superiority of the woman, which had never before incommoded him, now became positively hateful to him. It carried with it, now that it was no longer his mainstay, a power which

was humiliating, because it was fear-inspiring. Routh was afraid of his wife, and knew that he was afraid of her, when he had ceased to love her, after he had begun to dislike her; so much afraid of her that he kept up appearances to an extent, and for a duration of time, inexpressibly irksome to a man so callous, so egotistical, so entirely devoid of any sentiment or capacity of gratitude.

Such was the position of affairs when George Dallas and Mr. Felton left London to join Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers at Homburg. From the time of his arrival, and even when he had yielded to the clever arguments which had been adduced to urge him to silence, there was a sense of insecurity, a foreboding in Routh's mind; not a trace of the sentimental superstitious terror with which imaginary criminals are invested after the fact, but with the reasonable fear of a shrewd man, in a tremendously dangerous and difficult position, who knows he has made a false move, and looks, with moody perplexity, for the consequences sooner or later.

“He must have come to England, at all events, Stewart,” Harriet said to her husband, when he

cursed his own imprudence for the twentieth time; "he must have come home to see his uncle. Mr. Felton would have been directed here to us by the old woman at Poynings, and we must have given his address. Remember, his uncle arrived in England the same day he did."

"I should have sent him to George, not brought George to him," said Routh. "And there's that uncle of his, Felton; he is no friend of ours, Harriet; he does not like us."

"I am quite aware of that," she answered; "civil as he is, he is very honest, and has never pretended to be our friend. If he is George's friend, and George has told him anything about his life since he has known us, I think we could hardly expect him to like us."

Her husband gave her one of his darkest looks, but she did not remark it. Many things passed now without attracting her notice; even her husband's looks, and sometimes his words, which were occasionally as bitter as he dared to make them.

He was possessed with a notion that he must, for a time at least, keep a watch upon George Dallas; not near, indeed, nor apparently close,

but constant, and as complete as the maintenance of Harriet's influence with him made possible. For himself, he felt his own influence was gone, and he was far too wise to attempt to catch at it, as it vanished, or to ignore its absence. He acquiesced in the tacit estrangement; he was never in the way, but he never lost sight of George; he always knew what he was doing, and had early information of his movements, and with tolerable accuracy, considering that the spy whose services he employed was quite an amateur and novice.

This spy was Mr. James Swain, who took to the duties of his new line of business with vigorous zeal, and who seemed to derive a grim kind of amusement from their discharge. Stewart Routh had arrived with certainty at the conclusion that the young man had adhered to the promised silence up to the time of his leaving England with his uncle, and he felt assured that Mr. Felton was in entire ignorance of the circumstances which had had such terrible results for Mrs. Carruthers. It was really important to him to have George Dallas watched, and, in setting Jim Swain to watch him, he was inspired by darkly sinister

motives, in view of certain remote contingencies—motives which had suggested themselves to him shortly after George's unhesitating recognition of the boy who had taken Routh's note to Deane, on the last day of the unhappy man's life, had solved the difficulty which had long puzzled him. Only second in importance to his keeping George Dallas in view was his not losing sight of the boy; and all this time it never occurred to Routh, as among the remote possibilities of things, that Mr. Jim Swain was quite as determined to keep an eye on him.

Harriet had acquiesced in her husband's proposal that they should go to Homburg readily. It happened that she was rather more cheerful than usual on the day he made it, more like, though still terribly unlike, her former self. She was in one of those intervals in which the tortured prisoner stoops at the stake, during a temporary suspension of the inventive industry of his executioner. The fire smouldered for a little, the pincers cooled. She was in the hands of inflexible tormentors, and who could tell what device

of pain might attend the rousing from the brief torpor? Nature must have its periods of rest for the mind, be the agony ever so great; and hers was of the slow and hopeless kind which has such intervals most surely, and with least efficacy. One of them had come just then, and she was placid, drowsy, and acquiescent. She went with Routh to Homburg; he managed to make some hopeful, promising, and credulous acquaintances on the way, and was besides accredited to some "business people," of perfectly authentic character, at Frankfurt, in the interest of the flourishing Flinders.

The change, the novelty, the sight of gaiety in which she took no share, but which she looked on at with a partial diversion of her mind, did her good. It was something even to be out of England; not a very rational or well-founded relief, but still a relief, explicable and defensible too, on the theory to which she adhered, that all her ills were merely physical. The torpid interval prolonged itself, and the vital powers of the sufferer were recruited for the waking.

This took place when Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge's pony-carriage passed her as she sat by the

side of the broad shaded road, and the woman's splendid black eyes met hers. When her husband passed her without seeing her, absorbed in passionate admiration, which any child must have recognised as such, for the beautiful woman whose pony-carriage was like a triumphal chariot, so royal and conquering of aspect was she.

Keen were the tormentors, and full of avidity, and subtle was the new device to tax the recruited strength and mock the brief repose. It was raging, fierce, fiery, maddening jealousy.

It was late in the afternoon of the day on which Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge had sent her answer to Mr. Felton's note, and while Géorge Dallas was sitting with Mrs. Routh, that the beautiful widow and her companion—this time exploring the forest glades in another direction, in which they met but few of the visitors to the springs—once more mentioned Mr. Felton and his son. The gray ponies were going slowly, and the French groom in attendance was considering the probable direction of the "affair" in which his mistress had so precipitately engaged herself, and

which, being conducted in the English tongue, was interpreted to him by glances and tones only. The beauty of the face on which Stewart Routh was gazing in an intensity of admiration, with a certain desperation in it, in which a cleverer woman than this one would have seen indications of character to warn and alarm her, but which this one merely recognised as a tribute due to her, was marvellously bright and soft, as the slanting rays of the sun came through the tree stems, and touched it lingeringly, lovingly. Her black eyes had wonderful gleams and reflections in them, and the masses of her dark hair were daintily tinged and tipped with russet tints. She was looking a little thoughtful, a little dreamy. Was she tired, for the moment, of sparkling? Was she resting herself in an array of the semblance of tenderness, more enchanting still?

“You knew him, then, in your husband’s lifetime? He is not a new acquaintance?”

“What a catechist you are!” she said, with just a momentary glance at him, and the least flicker of a smile. “I did know him in my husband’s lifetime, who highly disapproved of him,

if you care for *that* piece of information; we were great friends and he was rather inclined to presume upon the fact afterwards."

She lingered upon the word, and gave it all the confirmatory expression Routh had expected and feared.

"And yet you make an appointment with him to meet him *here*, in this place, where every one is remarked and speculated upon; here, alone, where you are without even a companion ——" He paused, and with a light, mocking laugh, inexpressibly provoking, she said:

"Why don't you say a 'sheep-dog'? We know the immortal Becky quite as well as you do. In the first place, my appointment with Arthur Felton means simply nothing. I am just as likely to break it as to keep it; to go to London, or Vienna, or Timbuctoo, to-morrow, if the fancy takes me; or to stay here, and have him told I'm not at home when he calls, only that would please his father; and Mr. Felton is about the only male creature of my acquaintance whom I don't want to please. In the second place, I don't care one straw who remarks me, or what they remark, and have no

notion of allowing public opinion to take precedence of my pleasure.”

She laughed again, a saucy laugh which he did not like, gave him another glance and another flicker of her eyelash, and said :

“Why, how extremely preposterous you are ! You know well, if I cared what people could, would, might, or should say, I would not allow you to visit me every day, and I would not drive you out alone like this.”

The perfect unconcern and freedom of the remark took Routh by surprise, and disconcerted him as completely as its undeniable truth. He kept silence ; and Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge, amused at the blank expression of his countenance, burst into a hearty fit of laughter this time.

“I tell you I don't care about public opinion. All the men admire me, no matter what I do; and all the women hate me, and would hate me all the same, for my beauty—which I entirely appreciate, you know—if I made my life as dull and decorous, as miserable, squalid, and canting, as I make it pleasant, and joyous, and ‘not the thing.’ Neither

men nor women dare to insult me; and if they did, I should know how to meet the emergency, I assure you, though I am not at all clever. I am only courageous—'plucky,' your English ladies call it, I think, in the last new style of stable and barrack-room talk. I am that; I don't think that I could be afraid of anything or any one."

"Not of a man who really loved you with all the force and passion of his heart?" said Routh, in a hoarse whisper, and bending a fierce dark look upon her.

"Certainly not," she replied, lightly; but the colour rose in her cheek, and her breath came a little quicker. "I don't believe in people loving with passion and force, and all that sort of thing. It is pretty to talk about on balconies, and it looks well on paper, in a scrawly hand, running crookedly up into the corner, and with plenty of dashes, and no date—" And here she laughed again, and touched up the grays. Routh still kept silence, and still his dark look was bent upon her.

"No, no," she went on, as the rapid trot of the ponies began again to sound pleasantly on the

level road, and she turned them out of the forest boundaries towards the town, "I know nothing about all that, except *pour rire*, as they say in Paris, about everything under the sun, I do believe. To return to Arthur Felton; he is the last person in the world with whom I could imagine any woman could get up anything more serious than the flimsiest flirtation."

"You did 'get up' that, however, I imagine?" said Routh.

"Of course we did. We spouted very trite poetry, and he sent me bouquets—very cheap ones they were, too, and generally came late in the evening, when they may, being warranted not to keep, be had at literally a dead bargain; and we even exchanged photographs—I don't say portraits; you will observe. His is like enough; but that is really nothing, even among the most prudish of the blonde misses. I wonder the haberdashers don't send their likenesses with their bills, and I shall certainly give mine to the postman here; I am always grateful to the postman everywhere, and I like this one—he has nice eyes, his name is Hermann, and he does not smoke."

“What a degenerate German!” said Routh.  
“And so Mr. Arthur Felton has your likeness?”

“Had—had, you mean. How can I tell where it is now?—thrown in the fire, probably, and that of the reigning sovereign of his affections comfortably installed in the locket which contained it, which is handsome, I confess; but he does not so much mind spending money on himself, you see. It is exactly like this.”

She placed her whip across the reins, and held all with the left hand, while she fumbled with the right among the satin and lace in which she was wrapped, and drew out a short gold chain, to which a richly chased golden ball, as large as an egg, was attached. Turning slightly towards him, and gently checking her ponies, she touched a spring, and the golden egg opened lengthways, and disclosed two small finely executed photographs.

One was a likeness of herself, and Routh made the usual remarks about the insufficiency of the photographic art in certain cases. He was bending closely over her hand, when she reversed the revolving plate, and showed him the portrait on the other side.

“That is Arthur Felton,” she said.

Then she closed the locket, and let it drop down by her side amid the satin and the lace.

The French groom had in his charge a soft India shawl in readiness for his mistress, in case of need. This shawl Stewart Routh took from the servant, and wrapped very carefully round Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge as they neared the town.

“The evening has turned very cold,” he said; and, indeed, though she did not seem to feel it, and rather laughed at his solicitude, Routh shivered more than once before she set him down, near the Kursaal, and then drove homewards, past the house where his wife was watching for her, and waiting for him.

Routh ordered his dinner at the Kursaal, but, though he sat for a long time at the table, he ate nothing which was served to him. But he drank a great deal of wine, and he went home to Harriet—drunk.

“How horribly provoking! It must have come undone while I was handling it to-day,”

said Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge to her maid, when that domestic was attiring her for dinner. "I had the locket, open, not an hour ago."

"Yes, ma'am," answered the maid, examining the short gold chain; "it is not broken, the swivel is open."

"And of all my lockets, I liked my golden egg best," lamented Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge.

## CHAPTER II.

### A FIRST APPEAL.

“STEWART,” said Harriet Routh to her husband in a tone of calm, self-possessed inquiry, on the following day, “what has happened? What occurred yesterday, which you had not the courage to face, and deprived yourself of the power of telling me?”

As Harriet asked him this question, she unconsciously assumed her former manner. Something told her that the cause of Routh’s conduct, and of the distress of mind which she read in his face, was not connected with the subject that was torturing her. Anything apart from that, any misfortune, any calamity even, might draw them together again; might teach him anew his need of her, her worth to him—she felt some alarm, but it was strangely mingled with satisfaction. The sharp agony she had endured had

impaired her faculties so far, had dulled her clear understanding so far, that the proportions of the dangers in her path had changed places, and the first and greatest danger was this stranger—this beautiful, dreadful woman. In that direction was the terrible impotence, the helpless horror of weakness, which is the worst attribute of human suffering; in every other, there was the power to exercise her faculties, to rally her presence of mind, to call on her fertility of resource, to act for and with him. With him at her side, and in his cause, Harriet was consciously strong; but from a trouble in which he should be arrayed against her, in which he should be her enemy, she shrank, like a leaf from the shrivelling touch of fire.

She was standing by his side as she asked him the question, in the familiar attitude which she had discarded of late. Her composed figure and pale calm face, the small firm white hand, which touched his shoulder with the steady touch he knew so well, the piercing clear blue eyes, all had the old promise in them, of help that had never failed, of counsel that had never mis-

led. He thought of all these things, he felt all these things, but he no longer thought of, or remembered, or looked for the love which had been their motive and their life. He sat moodily, his face pale and frowning, one clenched hand upon his knee, the other restlessly drumming upon the table; his eyes were turned away from her, and for some time after she had spoken he kept a sullen silence.

“Tell me, Stewart,” she repeated, in a softer voice, while the hand that touched his shoulder moved gently to his neck and clasped it. “I know there is something wrong, very wrong. Tell me what it is.”

He turned and looked full at her.

“Do you remember what you said, Harriet, when that letter came from Poynings—what you said about the hydra and its heads?”

“I remember,” she answered. Her pale cheek grew paler; but she drew nearer to his side, and her fingers clasped his neck more closely and more tenderly. “I remember. Another head has sprung up, and is menacing you.”

“Yes,” he said, half fiercely, half wearily.

“This cursed thing is never to be escaped nor forgotten, I believe. I can hardly tell you what has happened, Harry, and even you will hardly see your way out of this.”

A touch of feeling for her was in his voice. He really did suffer in the anticipation of the shock she would have to sustain.

“Tell me—tell me,” she repeated, faintly, and with a quick involuntary closing of her eyes, which would have told a close observer of constant suffering and apprehension.

“Sit down, Harry.” He rose as he spoke, placed her in his chair, and stood before her, holding both her hands in his.

“I have found out that the man we knew as Philip Deane was—was Arthur Felton, George Dallas’s cousin, the man they are inquiring about, whom they are expecting here.”

She did not utter a cry, a groan, or any sort of sound. She shrank into the chair she was sitting in, as if she cowered for life in a hiding-place, her outstretched hands turned cold and clammy in her husband’s grasp. Into her widely opened blue eyes a look of unspeakable horror

came, and the paleness of her cheeks turned to ashen gray. Stewart Routh, still standing before her holding her hands, looked at her as the ghastly change came over her face, telling—what words could never tell—of the anguish she was suffering, and thought for a moment that she was dying before his face. The breath came from her lips in heavy gasps, and her low white brow was damp with cold sluggish drops.

“Harriet,” said Routh—“Harriet, don’t give way like this. It’s awful—it’s worse than anything I ever thought of, or feared. But don’t give way like this.”

“I am not giving way,” she said. Drawing her hands from his hold, she raised them to her head, and held them pressed to her temples while she spoke. “I will not give way. Trust me, as you have done before. This, then, is what I have felt coming nearer and nearer, like a danger in the dark—this—this dreadful truth. It is better known than vague. Tell me how you have discovered it.”

He began to walk up and down the room, and she still sat cowering in her chair, her hands

pressing her temples, her eyes, with their horror-stricken looks, following him.

“I discovered it by an extraordinary accident. I have not seen much of Dallas, as you know, and I know nothing in particular about Mr. Felton and his son. But there is a lady here—an American widow—who knows Felton well.”

“Yes,” said Harriet, with distinctness; and now she sat upright in her chair, and her low white brow was knitted over her horror-stricken eyes. “Yes, I have seen her.”

“Have you indeed? Ah! well, then, you know who I mean. She and he were great friends—lovers, I fancy,” Routh went on, with painful effort; “and when they parted in Paris, it was with an understanding that they were to meet here just about this time. She met George Dallas, and told him, not that, but something which made him understand that information was to be had from her, and she has appointed an interview with Mr. Felton for to-morrow.”

“Yes,” repeated Harriet, “I understand. When she and he meet, she will tell him his son

is coming here. His son will not come. How did you discover what you have discovered?"

He took out of his pocket a large locket like a golden egg, and opened it by touching a spring. It opened lengthwise, and he held it towards Harriet. She looked at one of the photographs which it enclosed, and then, pushing it from her, covered her face with her hands.

"She showed me that yesterday," Routh continued, his throat drier, his voice more hesitating with every word he spoke, "when she told me she was expecting him—and I contrived to secure it."

"For what purpose?" asked Harriet, hoarsely.

"Don't you see, Harriet," he said, earnestly, "that it is quite plain Dallas has never seen a likeness of his cousin, or he must have recognised the face? Evidently Mr. Felton has not one with him. Dallas might not have seen this; but then, on the other hand, he might; and to prevent his seeing it, even for a few hours, until we had time to talk it over, to gain ever so little time, was a great object."

"You took a strange way of gaining time,

Stewart," said Harriet. "Had you come home last night in a state to tell me the truth, time would really have been gained. We might have got away this morning."

"Got away!" said Routh. "What do you mean? What good could that do?"

"Can you seriously ask me?" she returned. "Does any other course suggest itself to you?"

"I don't know, Harry. I am bewildered. The shock was so great that the only thing I could think of was to try and forget it for a little. I don't know that I ever in my life deliberately drank for the purpose of confusing my thoughts, or postponing them, before; but I could not help it, Harry. The discovery was so far from any apprehension or fancy I had ever had."

"The time was, Stewart," said Harriet, slowly and with meaning, "when, instead of 'confusing' or 'postponing' any trouble, dread, or difficulty, you would have brought any or all of them to me at once; unhappily for us both, I think that time is past."

He glanced at her sharply and uneasily, and an angry flush passed over his face.

“What cursed folly have you got in your head? Is it not enough that this fresh danger has come down upon me—”

“Upon *us*, you mean,” she interrupted, calmly.

“Well, upon *us*, then—but you must get up an injured air, and go on with I don’t know what folly? Have done with it; this is no time for womanish nonsense—”

“There is so much womanish nonsense about me! There is such reasonableness in your reproach!”

Again he looked angrily at her, as he walked up and down the room with a quicker step. He was uneasy, amazed at the turn she had taken, at the straying of her attention from the tremendous fact he had revealed; but, above and beyond all this, he was afraid of her.

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and said, “Let it drop, let it drop; let me be as unreasonable as you like, and blame me as much as you please, but be truer to yourself, Harriet, to your own helpful nature, than to yield to

such fancies now. This is no time for them. We must look things in the face, and act."

"It is not I, but you, who refuse to look things in the face, Stewart. This woman, whom I do not know, who has not sought my acquaintance, whose name you have not once mentioned before me, but who makes you the confidant of her flirtations and her appointments—she is young and beautiful, is she not?"

"What the devil does it matter whether she is or not?" said Routh, fiercely. "I think you are bent on driving me mad. What has come to you? I don't know you in this new character. I tell you, this woman—"

"Mrs. Bembridge," said Harriet, calmly.

"Mrs. Bembridge, then, has been the means of my making a discovery which is of tremendous importance, and thus she has unconsciously saved me from an awful danger."

"By preventing George Dallas from finding out this fact for a little longer?"

"Precisely so. Now I hope you have come to yourself, Harriet, and will talk rationally about this."

“I will,” she said, rising from her chair and approaching him. She placed her hands upon his shoulders, and looked at him with a steady, searching look. “We will talk this out, Stewart, and I will not shrink from anything there is to be said about it; but you must hear me then, in my turn. We are not like other people, Stewart, and our life is not like theirs. Only ruin can come of any discord or disunion between us.”

Then she quietly turned away and sat down by the window, with her head a little averted from him, waiting for him to speak. Her voice had been low and thrilling as she said those few words, without a tone of anger in it, and yet the callous man to whom they were addressed heard in them something which sounded like the warning or the menace of doom.

“When Dallas knows what we now know, Harriet,” said Routh, “he will come to us and tell us his discovery, and then the position of affairs will be that for which we were prepared, if we had not succeeded in inducing him to be silent about Deane’s identity.”

“Exactly so,” said Harriet; “with the addi-

tional difficulty of his having concealed his knowledge."

"Yes," said Routh; "but that is *his* affair, not ours. He concealed his knowledge because he was compromised. There is nothing to compromise me. I neglected a public duty, certainly, in favour of a private friendship; but that is a venial offence."

It was wonderful to see how the callousness of the man asserted itself. As he arranged the circumstances, and stated them, he began to regain his accustomed ease of manner.

"It is unfortunate that he should be compromised in this double way, and, of course, there will be a great deal to go through, which will be hard to bear, and not easy to manage; but, after all, the thing is only as bad as it was when Dallas came back. Don't you see that, Harriet?"

"I see that, Stewart, but I also see that he will now have a tenfold interest in finding out the truth. Hitherto he might have been content with clearing himself of suspicion, but now he will be the one person most deeply interested in discovering the truth."

“But how can he discover it?” said Routh; his face darkened, and he dropped his voice still lower. “Harriet, have you forgotten that if there be danger from him, there is also the means of turning that danger on himself? Have you forgotten that I can direct suspicion against him tenfold stronger than any that can arise against me?”

She shivered, and closed her eyes again. “No, I have not forgotten,” she said; “but O, Stewart, it is an awful thing to contemplate—a horrible expedient.”

“Yet you arranged it with a good deal of composure, and said very little about its being horrible at the time,” said Routh, coarsely. “I hope you are not going to be afflicted with misplaced and ill-timed scruples now. It’s rather late in the day, you know, and you’ll have to choose, in that case, between Dallas and me.”

She made him no answer.

“The thing is just this,” he continued; “Dallas cannot come to any serious grief, I am convinced; but, if the occasion arises, he must be let come to whatever grief there may be—a trial and

an acquittal at the worst. The tailor's death, and his mother's recovery, will tell in his favour, though I've no doubt he will supply all the information Evans would have given, of his own accord. I think there is no real risk; but, Harriet, much, very much, depends on you."

"On me, Stewart! How?"

"In this way. When Dallas comes to see you, you must find out whether any other clue to the truth exists; if not, there is time before us. You must keep up the best relations with him, and find out all he is doing. Is it not very odd that he has not mentioned his uncle's solicitude about his son to you?"

"I don't think so, Stewart. I feel instinctively that Mr. Felton dislikes and distrusts us—(what well-founded dislike and distrust it was!" she thought, mournfully, with a faint pity for the unconscious father)—"and George knows it, I am sure, and will not talk to me about his uncle's affairs. He is right there; there is delicacy of feeling in George Dallas."

"You seem to understand every turn in his disposition," said Routh, with a sneer.

“There are not many to understand,” replied Harriet, simply. “The good and the evil in him are easily found, being superficial. However, we are not talking of his character, but of certain irreparable harm which we must do him, it seems, in addition to that which we have done. Go on with what you were saying.”

“I was saying that you must find out what you can, and win his confidence in every way. I shall keep as clear of him as possible, under any circumstances. If the interview of to-morrow goes off without any discovery, there will be a chance of its not being made at all.”

“Impossible, Stewart—quite impossible,” said Harriet, earnestly. “Do not nourish any such expectation. How long, do you suppose, will Mr. Felton remain content with expecting his son’s arrival, and hearing no news of him? How soon will he set inquiries on foot which must end in discovery? Remember, hiding is possible only when there is no one seeking, urged by a strong motive to find. Listen to me, now, in your turn, and listen to me as you used to do, not to cavil at my words, or sneer at them, but to weigh them

well. This is a warning to us, Stewart. I don't talk superstition, as you know. I don't believe in any nonsense of the kind; but this I do believe, because experience teaches it, that there are combinations of circumstances in which the wise may read signs and tokens which do not mislead. Here is just such a case. The first misfortune was George's return; it was confirmed by his uncle's arrival; it is capped by this terrible discovery. Stewart, let us be warned and wise in time; let us return to England at once—to-morrow. I suppose you will have the means of learning the tenor of Mr. Felton's interview with this lady who knew his son so well. If no discovery be then made, let us take it as another indication of luck, circumstance, what you will, and go."

"What for?" said Routh, in amazement. "Are you returning to that notion, when all I have said is to show you that you must not lose sight of Dallas?"

"I know," she said—"I know; but you are altogether wrong. George Dallas must make the discovery some time, and must bear the brunt of the suspicion. I don't speak in his interests, but

in yours—in mine. Let it come when it may, but let us be away out of it all. We have money now, Stewart—at least, we are not so poor but that we may make our way in another country—that we may begin another life. Have I ever talked idly, Stewart, or given you evil counsel? No, surely not. In all the years for which you have been all the world to me, I have never spoken vainly; let me not speak vainly now. I might implore, I might entreat,” she went on, her eyes now bright with eagerness and her hands clasped. “I might plead a woman’s weakness and natural terror; I might tell you I am not able for the task you dictate to me; but I tell you none of these things. I am able to do and to suffer anything, everything that may or must be done, or suffered for you. I don’t even speak of what I *have* suffered; but I say to you, be guided by me in this—yield to me in this. There is a weak spot in our stronghold; there is a flaw in our armour. I know it. I cannot tell, I cannot guess where it is. An instinct tells me that ruin is threatening us, and this is our way of escape. O, my husband, listen to me!”

He was standing opposite to her, leaning against an angle of the wall, mingled fury and amazement in his face, but he did not interrupt her by a word or a sign.

“There is no power in me,” she went on, “to tell you the strength of my conviction that this is the turning-point in our fate. Let us take the money we have, and go. Why should you stay in England, Stewart, more than in any other country? We have no ties but one another.” She looked at him more sharply here, through all her earnestness. “Friendships and the obligations they bring are not for us. The world has no home-bonds for us. Where money is to be made you can live, in such content as you can ever have; and where you are I am as content as I can ever be.”

“You are a cheerful counsellor,” Routh broke out, in uncontrollable passion. “Do you think I am mad, woman, when I have played so desperate a game, and am winning it so fast, that I should throw up my cards now? Let me hear no more of this. Come to your senses, if you can, and as soon as you can, for I will not stand this sort of

thing, I can tell you. I will not leave this place an hour sooner than I intended to leave it. And as to leaving England, if the worst came to pass that could happen, I should hardly be driven to that extremity. What devil is in you, Harriet, to prompt you to exasperate me, when I looked to you for help?"

"What devil is in *you*," she answered him, rising as she spoke, "that is prompting you to your ruin? What devil, do I say? Words, mere words. What do I know or believe of God, or devil, or any ruling power but the wicked will of men and women, to waylay, and torture, and destroy? The devil of blindness is in you, the devil of wilfulness, the devil of falsehood and ingratitude; and a blacker devil still, I tell you. See that it does not rend you, as I read in the old book—for ever closed for me."

Her breast was heaving violently, and her eyes were unnaturally bright, but there was not a ray of colour in her face, and her voice was rapid and unfaltering in its utterance. Routh looked at her, and hated her. Hated her, and feared her, and uttered never a word.

“The madness that goes before destruction is coming fast upon you,” she said; “I see it none the more clearly because that destruction must involve me too. Let it come; I am ready for it, as I have been ready for any evil for a long time now. You speak idle words to me when you reproach me, Stewart. I am above and beyond reproach from you. I am as wicked a woman, if the definition of good and evil be true, as ever lived upon this earth; but I have been, and am, to you what no good woman could be—and look to it, if you requite me ill. I don’t threaten you in saying this—no threats can come from me, nor would any avail—but in your treachery to me, its own punishment will be hidden, ready to spring out upon and destroy you. Scorn my influence, slight my counsel, turn a deaf ear to the words that are inspired by love such as only a wretch like me, with no hope or faith at all in Heaven, and only this hope and faith on Earth, can feel—and see the end.”

He stepped forward and was going to speak, but she put out her hand and stopped him.

“Not now. Don’t say anything to me, don’t

ask me anything now. Don't speak words that I must be doomed for ever to remember—for ever to long to forget. Have so much mercy on me, for the sake of the past and for the sake of the present. Ruin is impending over us; if you will, you may escape it; but there is only one way."

She had drawn near the door as she spoke the last words. In another instant she had left him.

Left him in a most unenviable state of bewilderment, rage, and confusion. The emotion which had overpowered him when he had made the discovery of yesterday was almost forgotten in the astonishment with which Harriet's words had filled him. An uneasy sense, which was not anything so wholesome as shame, was over him. What did she know of his late proceedings? Had she watched him? Had any of the gossiping tongues of the place carried the tidings of the beautiful American's openly paraded conquest? No, that could hardly be, for Harriet knew no one at Homberg but George, and George knew nothing about him. Was he not always with either his mother, or his uncle, or with Harriet herself? Besides,

George would not say anything to Harriet that could hurt her. The fellow was a fool and soft-hearted, his quondam friend thought, with much satisfaction. He must set it right with Harriet, however; under any circumstances he must not quarrel with her; in this fresh complication particularly. It could only be a general notion that she had taken, and he must endeavour to remove it; for though he was horribly weary of her, though he hated her at that moment, and felt that he should very likely continue to hate her, even at that moment, and while resolved to disregard her advice, and utterly unmoved by her appeal, he knew he could not afford to lose her aid.

If the beautiful American could have seen the visions of probabilities or possibilities in which she was concerned, that floated through Stewart Routh's mind as he stood gazing out of the window when his wife had left him, she might, perhaps, have felt rather uneasy at the revelation. Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge was not an adept at reading character, and sometimes, when a disagreeable impression that her new admirer was a

man of stronger will and tougher material than she altogether liked to deal with, crossed her mind, she would dismiss it with the reflection that such earnestness was very flattering and very exciting for a time, and the duration of that time was entirely within her choice and discretion.

Stewart Routh stood at the window thinking hurriedly and confusedly of these things. There was a strange fear over him, with all his assurance, with all the security which he affirmed over and over again to himself, and backed up with a resolution which he had determined from the first to conceal from Harriet.

“If my own safety positively demands it,” he thought, “Jim’s evidence about the note will be useful, and the payment to the landlady will be tolerably conclusive. Dallas told Harriet the initials were A. F. I wonder it never occurred to me at the time.”

Presently he heard Harriet’s step in the corridor. It paused for a moment at the sitting-room, then passed on, and she went out. She was closely veiled, and did not turn her head towards the window as she went by. Routh drew nearer and

watched her, as she walked swiftly away. Then he caught sight of George Dallas approaching the house. He and Harriet met and shook hands, then George turned and walked beside her. They were soon out of sight.

“I don’t think I shall see much more of Hom-  
burg,” George was saying. “My mother has  
taken an extraordinary longing to get back to  
Poynings. Dr. Merle says she must not be op-  
posed in anything not really injurious. She is  
very anxious I should go with her, and Mr. Car-  
ruthers is very kind about it.”

“You will go, George, of course?”

“I don’t quite know what to do, Mrs. Routh.  
I don’t like to let my mother go without me, now  
that things are so well squared; I don’t like to  
persuade her to put off her journey, and yet I feel  
I ought, if possible, to remain with my uncle until  
his truant son turns up.”

“Has—has nothing been heard of him yet?”

“Not a word. I was awfully frightened about  
it, though I hid it from my uncle, until I met Mrs.  
Ireton P. &c. But though she didn’t say much,  
I could see by her manner it was all right. Bless

you, *she* knows all about him, Mrs. Routh. I dare say he'll appear next week, and be very little obliged to us all for providing a family party for him here."

## CHAPTER III.

### DURING THE LULL.

ON the appointed day, at the appointed hour, Mr. Felton, accompanied by his nephew, called on Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge, who received the two gentlemen with no remarkably cordiality. Coquetry was so inseparable from her nature and habits, that she could not forbear from practising a few of her fascinations upon the younger man, and she therefore relaxed considerably from the first formality of her demeanour after a while. But George Dallas was the least promising and encouraging of subjects for the peculiar practice of the beautiful widow, and he so resolutely aided his uncle in placing the conversation on a strictly business footing, and keeping it there, as to speedily convince the lady that he was entirely unworthy of her notice. She was not destitute of a certain good nature which rarely fails to

accompany beauty, wealth, and freedom, and she settled the matter with herself by reflecting that the young man was probably in love with some pretty girl, to whom he wrote his verses, and considered it proper to be indifferent to the attractions of all female charmers beside. She did not resent his inaccessibility; she merely thought of it as an odd coincidence that Mr. Felton's nephew should be as little disposed to succumb to love as Mr. Felton himself, and felt inclined to terminate the interview as soon as possible. Consequently, she made her replies to Mr. Felton's questions shorter and colder as they succeeded one another, so that he felt some difficulty in putting that particular query on which George had laid restricted stress. He did not perceive how deep and serious his nephew's misgivings had become, and George grasped at every excuse that presented itself for deferring the awakening of fears which, once aroused, must become poignant and terrible. He had learned from Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge some of the facts which she had communicated to Routh: young Felton's intention of visiting Homburg at about

the period of the year which they had then reached; his departure from Paris, and the unbroken silence since maintained towards her as towards Mr. Felton himself. The information she had to give was in itself so satisfactory, so tranquillising, that Mr. Felton, who had no reason to expect obedience from his son, felt all his fears—very dim and vague in comparison with those which had assailed George's mind—asuaged. It was only when his nephew had given him some very expressive looks, and he had seen the fine dark eyes of Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge directed unequivocally towards the allegorical timepiece which constituted one of the chief glories of the Schwarzchild mansion, that he said:

“My nephew has never seen his cousin, Mrs. Bembridge, and I have no likeness of him with me. I know you are a collector of photographs; perhaps you have one of Arthur?”

“I had one, Mr. Felton,” replied Mrs. Bembridge, graciously, “and would have shown it to Mr. Dallas with pleasure yesterday, but, unfortunately, I have lost it in some unaccountable way.”

“Indeed,” said Mr. Felton; “that is very unfortunate. Was it not in your book, then?”

“I wore it in a locket,” said the lady, with a very slight accession to the rich colour in her cheek—“a valuable gold locket, too. I am going to have it cried.”

“Allow me to have that done for you,” said Mr. Felton. “If you will describe the locket, and can say where you were yesterday, and at what time, I will take the necessary steps at once; these may not succeed, you know; we can but try.”

So Mrs. Bembridge described the lost trinket accurately, and the visit came to a conclusion. As the two gentlemen were leaving the house, they met Mr. Carruthers, who accosted Mr. Felton with stately kindliness, and, entering at once into conversation with him, prevented the interchange of any comment upon the interview which had just taken place between the uncle and nephew. George left the elder gentlemen together, and turned his steps towards Harriet’s lodgings. In a few minutes he met her and joined her in her walk, as Routh had seen from the window.

He stood there, long after George and Harriet had passed out of sight, thinking, with sullen desperate rage, of all she had said. He felt like an animal in a trap. All his care and cunning, all his caution and success, had come to this. It was strange, perhaps—if the probability or the strangeness of anything in such a condition of mind as his can be defined—that he seldom thought of the dead man. No curiosity about him had troubled the triumph of Routh's schemes. He had met so many men in the course of his life who were mere waifs and strays in the world of pleasure and swindling, who had no ties and no history; about whom nobody cared; for whom, on their disappearance from the haunts in which their presence had been familiar, nobody inquired, that one more such instance, however emphasised by his own sinister connection with him, made little impression on Stewart Routh. Looking back now in the light of this revelation, he could not discover that any intimation had ever been afforded to, or had ever been overlooked by him. The dead man had never dropped a hint by which his identity might have been discovered, nor had

he, on the other hand, ever betrayed the slightest wish or purpose of concealment, which probably would have aroused Routh's curiosity, and set his investigative faculties to work. He had never speculated, even at times when all his callousness and cynicism did not avail to make him entirely oblivious of the past, on the possibility of his learning anything of the history of Philip Deane; he had been content to accept it, as well as its termination, as among the number of the wonderful mysteries of this wonderful life, and had, so far as in him lay, dismissed the matter from his mind. Nothing that had ever happened in his life before had given him such a shock as the discovery he had made yesterday. The first effect on him has been seen; the second, ensuing on his conversation with his wife, was a blind and desperate rage, of a sort to which he had rarely yielded, and of whose danger he was dimly conscious, even at its height. He was like a man walking on a rope at a giddy elevation, to whom the first faint symptoms of vertigo were making themselves felt, who was invaded by the death-bringing temptation to look down and around him.

The solemn and emphatic warning of his wife had had its effect upon his intellect, though he had hardened his heart against it. It was wholly impossible that her invariable judgment, perception, and reasonableness—the qualities to which he had owed so much in all their former life—could become immediately valueless to a man of Routh's keenness; he had not yet been turned into a fool by his sudden passion for the beautiful American; he still retained sufficient sense to wonder and scoff at himself for having been made its victim so readily; and he raged and rebelled against the conviction that Harriet was right, but raged and rebelled in vain.

In the whirl of his thoughts there was fierce torture, which he strove unavailingly to subdue: the impossibility of evading the discovery which must soon be made; the additional crime by which alone he could hope to escape suspicion; a sudden unborn fear that Harriet would fail him in this need—a fear which simply signified despair—a horrid, baffled, furious helplessness; and a tormenting, overmastering passion for a woman who treated him with all the calculated

cruelty of coquetry—these were the conflicting elements which strove in the man's dark, bad heart, and rent it between them, as he stood idly by the window where his wife had been accustomed to sit and undergo her own form of torture.

By degrees one fear got the mastery over the others, and Routh faced it boldly. It was the fear of Harriet. Suppose the worst came to the worst, he thought, and there was no other way of escape, would she suffer him to sacrifice George? *He* could do it; the desperate resource which he had never hinted to her was within his reach. They had talked over all possibilities in the beginning, and had agreed upon a plan and direction of flight in certain contingencies, but he had always entertained the idea of denouncing George, and now, by the aid of Jim Swain, he saw his way to doing so easily and successfully. Harriet had always been a difficulty, and now the obstacle assumed portentous proportions. He had no longer his old power over her. He knew that; she made him feel this in many ways; and now he had aroused her jealousy. He felt

instinctively that such an awakening was full of terrible danger; of blind, undiscoverable peril. He did not indeed know by experience what Harriet's jealousy might be, but he knew what her love was, and the ungrateful villain trembled in his inmost soul as he remembered its strength, its fearlessness, its devotion, its passion, and its unscrupulousness, and thought of the possibility of all these being arrayed against him. Not one touch of pity for her, not one thought of the agony of such love betrayed and slighted; of her utter loneliness; of her complete abandonment of all her life to him, intruded upon the tumult of his angry mind. He could have cursed the love which had so served him, now that it threatened opposition to his schemes of passion and of crime. He did curse it, and her, deeply, bitterly, as one shade after another of fierce evil expression crossed his face.

There was truth in what she had said, apart from the maudlin sentiment from which not even the strongest-minded woman, he supposed, could wholly free herself—there was truth, a stern, hard truth. He could indeed escape now, taking

with him just enough money to enable them to live in decent comfort, or to make a fresh start in a distant land, where only the hard and honest industries throve and came to good. How he loathed the thought! How his soul sickened at the tame, miserable prospect! He would have loathed it always, even when Harriet and he were friends and lovers; and now, when he feared her, when he was tired of her, when he hated her, to contemplate such a life *now*, was worse—well, not worse than death, that is always the worst of all things to a bad man, but something too bad to be thought of. There was truth in what she had said, and the knowledge of what was in his own thoughts, the knowledge she did not share, made it all the more true. Supposing he determined to denounce George, and supposing Harriet refused to aid him, what then? Then he must only set her at defiance. If such a wild impossibility as her betraying him could become real, it would be useless. She was his wife; she could not bear witness against him; in that lay his strength and security, even should the very worst, the most inconceivably unlikely of human

events, come to pass. And he would set her at defiance! He kept up no reticence with himself now. Within a few days a change had come upon him, which would have been terrible even to him, had he studied it. He hated her. He hated her, not only because he had fallen madly in love with another woman and was day by day becoming more enslaved by this new passion: not chiefly even because of this, but because she was a living link between him and the past. That this should have happened now! That she should have right and reason, common sense, and all the force of probability on her side, in urging him to fly, now—now when he was prospering, when the success of a new speculation in which he had just engaged would, with almost absolute certainty, bring him fortune,—this exasperated him almost to the point of frenzy.

Then there arose before his tossed and tormented mind the vision of a blissful possibility. This other beautiful, fascinating woman, who had conquered him by a glance of her imperial eyes, who had beckoned him to her feet by a wave of her imperial hand—could he not make her love

him well enough to sacrifice herself for him also? Might he not escape from the toils which were closing around him into a new, a glorious liberty, into a life of wealth, and pleasure, and love? She had yielded so immediately to the first influence he had tried to exert over her; she had admitted him so readily to an intimacy to whose impropriety, according to the strict rules of society, she had unhesitatingly avowed herself aware and indifferent; she had evinced such undisguised pleasure in his society, and had accepted his unscrupulous homage so unscrupulously, that he had as much reason as a coarse-minded man need have desired for building up a fabric of the most presumptuous hope.

As these thoughts swept over him, Routh turned from the window, and began again to stride up and down the room. His dark face cleared up, the hot blood spread itself over his sallow cheek, and his deep-set eyes sparkled with a sinister light. The desperate expedient to which he had resorted on the previous day had gained him time, and time was everything in the game he designed to play. The discovery would not

be made for some time by George Dallas. When it should be made, his triumph might be secured, he might be beyond the reach of harm from such a cause, safe in an elysium, with no haunting danger to disturb. The others concerned might be left to their fate—left to get out of any difficulty that might arise, as best they could. The time was short, but that would but inspire him with more courage and confidence; the daring of desperation was a mood which suited Stewart Routh well.

Hours told in such cases. The fire and earnestness with which he had spoken to the beautiful widow had evidently surprised and, he thought, touched her. If the demonstration had not been made in his own favour, but in that of another, no one would have more readily understood than Stewart Routh how much beauty of form and feature counts for in the interpretation of emotion, how little real meaning there may be in the beam of a dark bright eye, how little genuine emotion in the flush of a rose-tinted cheek. But it was his own case, and precisely because it was, Stewart Routh interpreted every

sign which his captor had made according to his wishes rather than by the light of his experience. Indeed, he had little experience of a kind to avail him in the present instance ; his experience had been of stronger, even more dangerous types of womanhood than that which Mrs. Bembridge represented, or of the infinitely meaner and lower. As he mused and brooded over the vision which had flashed upon him, not merely as a possibility to be entertained, as a hope to be cherished, but as something certain and definite to be done, his spirits, his courage, his audacity rose, and the dark cloud of dread and foreboding fell from him. He had so long known himself for a villain, that there was not even a momentary recoil in his mind from the exceeding baseness of the proceeding which he contemplated.

“I can count upon a fortnight,” he said to himself while completing a careful toilet, “and by that time I shall either be away from all this with her, or I shall be obliged to put George Dallas in jeopardy. If I fail with *her*—but I won’t think of failure ; I cannot fail.” He left a message with Harriet, to the effect that he

should not dine at home that day (but without any explanation of his further movements), and went out.

“I do not see the force of your reasons for objecting to my introducing you to my mother,” said George Dallas to Harriet. Mrs. Carruthers had passed them in an open carriage during their walk, and George had urged Harriet to make his mother’s acquaintance.

“Don’t you ?” she replied, with a smile in which weariness and sadness mingled. “I think you would, if you thought over them a little. They include the necessity for avoiding anything like an unpleasant or distressing impression on her mind, and you know, George,” she said, anticipating and silencing deprecation by a gesture, “if she remembers your mention of me at all, she can remember it only to be distressed by it; and the almost equally important consideration of not incurring your step-father’s anger in any way.”

“As for that, I assure you he is everything that is kind to me now,” said George.

“I am happy to hear it; but do not, therefore, fall into an error which would come very easy to your sanguine and facile temperament. Be sure he is not changed in his nature, however modified he may be in his manners. Be quite sure he would object to your former associates just as strongly as ever; and remember, he would be right in doing so. Will you take my advice once more, George? You have done it before—” she stopped, and something like a shudder passed over her; “let bygones be completely bygones. Never try to associate the life and the home that will be yours for the future with anything in the past—least, O least of all, with us.”

“What do you mean, Mrs. Routh?” George asked her eagerly. “Do you mean that you want to give me up? I know Routh does—he has not spoken to me a dozen times of his own accord since he has been here—but you, do *you* want to get rid of me?”

She paused for a moment before she answered him. Should she say Yes, and be done with it? Should she let things drift on to the inevitable end, yielding to the lassitude of mind and body

which was stealing over her? Should she gain another argument to use in a renewed appeal to her husband for the flight in which she saw the sole prospect of safety, by providing herself with the power of telling him a rupture had taken place between herself and Dallas, and her power of guiding him was gone? The temptation was strong, but caution, habitual to her, instinctive in her, restrained her. Not yet, she thought; this may be my next move. George repeated his question :

“Do you mean that *you* want to get rid of me?”

“No,” she answered, “I do not, George. I was only led into overstating what I do want, that you should conform to your step-father’s reasonable wishes. He has been generous to you, be you just towards him.”

“I will,” said George warmly. “I wonder how far he will carry his newly-found good will. I wonder—” he paused; the name of Clare Carruthers was on his lips; in another moment he would have spoken of her to Harriet. He would have told her of the self-reproach, mingled, how-

ever, with hope, which daily grew and throve in the congenial soil of his sanguine nature; he would have pierced Harriet's heart with a new sorrow, a fresh remorse, by telling her of another life, young, innocent, and beautiful, involved in the storm about to burst, whose threatenings were already sounding in the air. But it was not to be—the name of Clare Carruthers was never to be spoken by George to Harriet. Apparently she had not heard his last words; her attention had strayed; she was very weary.

“I must go home,” she said abruptly. “We are close to your mother's house. You had better go to her now; she has returned from her drive.”

“Let me see you home,” said George; “pray don't dismiss me in this way.”

“No, no,” she said, hurriedly; “let me have my own way, please. You will come to me tomorrow, and let me know your plans.”

She stood still, and put out her hand so decidedly in the attitude of farewell, that he had no choice but to take leave of her. They parted on the shaded road, close to the garden gate of

Mr. Carruthers's house. As Harriet walked away with her usual rapid step, George looked after her very sadly.

“She is fearfully changed,” he said; “I never saw anything like it. Since I went to Amsterdam she might have lived twenty years and been less altered. Can it be that my uncle is right, that Routh ill-treats her? I wonder if there's any truth in what those fellows said last night about him and Mrs. Ireton P.? If there is, it's an infernal shame—an infernal shame.” And George Dallas opened the little gate in the wall, and walked up the garden with a moody countenance, on which, however, a smile showed itself as he lifted his hat gaily to his mother, who nodded to him from the window above. His spirits rose unaccountably. The positive information which Mrs. Bembridge had afforded Mr. Felton relative to his son's expected arrival had immensely relieved George's mind. He was satisfied with the progress of his novel; day by day his mother's health was improving. His prospects were bright. The distressing recollection of Deane, and the unhappy consequences of the tragedy, were be-

coming light and easy to him; sometimes he forgot all about it. If he could but win his stepfather's confidence and regard sufficiently to induce him to pardon his clandestine acquaintance with Clare, he would be altogether happy. How serene and beautiful the weather was! He stood in the verandah, which extended into the garden, bare-headed, and inhaled the sweet air with keen pleasure. His impressionable nature readily threw off care and caught at enjoyment.

"It's such a glorious afternoon, mother," he said, as he entered Mrs. Carruthers's sitting-room; "I'm sure you must have enjoyed your drive."

"I did, very much," his mother replied. "The air seems rather closer, I think, since I came in. I fancy we shall have a storm."

"O, no," said George carelessly. Then he said: "Shall I read you my last chapter? I want to post it this evening. It's a funny chapter, mother. I bring in the queer old bookseller I told you about, who persisted in being his own banker."

"I remember, George. What are you looking

at?" He had taken up a letter from the table beside her, and was scrutinising the address closely. "Are you admiring the handwriting? That is a letter from Clare Carruthers."

"O," said George. And he laid down the letter, and went to fetch his manuscript. So it was she who had forwarded Mr. Felton's letters to him! Ellen must have asked her to do so—must, therefore, have talked of him—have mentioned him in some way. But had she done so in a manner to arouse any suspicion in Clare's mind of his identity? Did Clare remember him? Did she think of him? Would she forgive him when she should know all? These and scores of cognate questions did George Dallas put vainly to himself while he read to his mother a chapter of his novel, which certainly did not gain in effect by his abstraction. It pleased the listener, however, and she knew nothing of his preoccupation; and as he made the packet up for post he came to a resolution that on the following day he would tell Harriet "all about it," and act on her advice.

With nightfall the wind arose, and a storm

blew and raged over the little white town, over the dark range of the Taunus, over the lighted gardens deserted by their usual frequenters, and, all unheeded, over the brilliant rooms where the play, and the dancing, and the music, the harmless amusement, and the harmful devilment went on just as usual. It blew over the house where Harriet lived, and raged against the windows of the room in which she sat in silence and darkness, except for the frequent glimmer which was thrown into the apartment from the street light, which shuddered and flickered in the rain and wind. Hour after hour she had sat there throughout the quiet evening during the lull, and when the darkness fell and the storm rose she laid her pale cheek against the window-pane and sat there still.

The shaded roads were deeply strewn with fallen leaves next day, and the sun-rays streamed far more freely through the branches, and glittered on pools of water in the hollows, and revealed much devastation among the flower-beds. Rain and wind had made a wide-spread excursion that night; had crossed the Channel, and rifled

the gardens and the woods of Poynings, and swept away a heavy tribute from the grand avenue of beeches and the stately clump of sycamores which Clare Carruthers loved.

George had finished a drawing very carefully from the sketch which he had made of the avenue of beeches, and, thinking over his approaching communication to Harriet, he had taken the drawing from its place of concealment in his desk, and was looking at it, wondering whether the storm of the past night had done mischief at the Sycamores, when a servant knocked at the door of his room. He put the drawing out of sight, and bade the man come in. He handed George a note from Harriet, which he read with no small surprise.

It told him that Routh had been summoned to London, on important business, by a telegram—"from that mysterious Flinders, no doubt," thought George, as he looked ruefully at the note—and that they were on the point of starting from Homburg. "Seven o'clock" was written at the top of the sheet. They were gone then; had been gone for hours. It was very provoking.

How dreary the place looked after the storm!  
How chilly the air had become! How much he  
wished Arthur would "turn up," and that they  
might all get away!

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE SEVERING OF THE HAIR.

THE storm which had swept unheeded over the heads bent over the gaming-tables at the Kursaal that wild autumn night, was hardly wilder and fiercer than the tempest in Stewart Routh's soul, as he, making one of the number of the gamblers, played with a quite unaccustomed recklessness, and won with surprising sequence. This was earlier in the night, when the powers of the air were only marshalling their forces, and the elemental war had not extended beyond the skirmishing stage. Many times he looked impatiently round, even while the ball was rolling, as if expecting to see some one, who still did not appear; then he would turn again to the green board, again stake and win, and resume his watch. At length a touch on his elbow caused him to look round in a contrary direction, where

he saw a man standing, who immediately handed him a note and went away. Then Routh smiled, read the words the note contained, smiled again, swept up the money which lay before him, and left the room. The battle had fairly begun as he stepped out from the shelter of the portico, and, buttoning his coat tightly across his chest, and pulling his hat down to his eyebrows, set himself, with bent head, against the storm. His way led him past his own lodgings, and as he took it on the opposite side of the street, he saw, indistinctly, Harriet's figure, as she sat close beside the window, her head against the panes. Something dreary and forsaken in the aspect of the window, with its flimsy curtains wide apart, the indistinct form close against the glass, no light within the room, made Routh shiver impatiently as he looked at it; and just then the light in the street flickered and swerved violently under the influence of a sudden blast, which drove a sharp cascade of rain rattling against the window.

“Moping there in the dark,” said Routh, with an oath, “and making things a hundred

times worse, with her cursed whining and temper."

The Schwarzchild mansion was near, and he was soon removed as far from all associations with discomfort and dreariness as brilliant light, a blazing fire of odorous wood burning in a room too large to be overheated by it, luxurious surroundings, and pleasant expectation could remove him from such discordant realities. Presently Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge made her appearance. The room was a long one, and she entered by a door which faced the chimney where he was standing. Much as he had admired her, irresistibly as her beauty had captivated him with its ordinary charm of recklessness and lustre, with its rare, far-between moments of softness and grace, he had never really understood until now how beautiful she was. For there was a mingling of both moods upon her as she came towards him, her amber silk dress, with the accustomed drapery of superb black lace falling round her, and sweeping the ground in folds such as surely no other mere gown, made by mundane milliner, had ever accomplished.

Rich purple amethysts were on her neck and on her wrists, and gleamed on the comb which held the coils of her hair. Wax-lights in profusion shed their softened light upon her, upon the cream and rose tints of her brow and cheeks, upon the scarlet of her lips, upon the marvellous darkness of her eyes; and the capricious blaze from the burning logs shot quivering streaks of light among the folds of her dress, glancing over the jewels she wore, and playing redly on the hand which she held out, while yet some steps divided her from Routh, gazing at her in absorbed, almost amazed admiration.

“How tired and pale you look!” she said, as he took the proffered hand, and she allowed him to hold it. The words were slowly spoken, in the tone of solicitude for him, which is one of the most potent weapons in a beautiful woman’s armoury. “Sit there,” she went on, drawing her hand gently from his hold and indicating a seat, while she settled herself into the recesses of a huge German sofa. “How could you imagine I would go to the Kursaal to-night? Just listen!” She held her hand

up; a cloud of filmy lace fell back from the beautiful round white arm. Then she dropped the hand slowly, and waited for him to speak. He spoke with strange difficulty; the spell of the power of her beauty was upon him. This was not what he had intended. He had meant to conquer, not to be conquered; to sway, not to be ruled.

“I thought,” he said, in a low tone, “you would have come, because—I—I did not know you would allow me the happiness of coming here.”

“Did you not? I think you don’t understand me yet. I wished to see you, you know, and I did not wish to go out this evening. It is quite simple, is it not?”

“It is indeed, for such a woman as you.”

She laughed.

“Is not that rather an awkward speech—rather an equivocal compliment? How *posed* you look!”

She laughed again. Routh felt unspeakably embarrassed; he had a sense of being at a disadvantage, which was unpleasant. She saw it, and said:

“What a temper you have! You’d be rather hard to please, I fancy, if one were in any sense bound to try.”

“Don’t jest with me,” said Routh, suddenly and sternly, and he rolled his chair deliberately near her as he spoke. “You did not allow me, you did not invite me to come here to-night; you did not do this, which seems so ‘simple’ to you, because you are as much braver than every other woman, as you are more beautiful,”—he looked into her dark eyes, and their lids did not droop,—“only to jest with me, only to trifle with me, as you trifle with others. You are a wonderfully puzzling woman, I acknowledge; no woman ever so puzzled me before. Each time I see you, there is something different, something new in your manner, and each time it is as though I had to begin all over again; as if I had not told you that I love you, as if you had not listened and confessed that you know it. Why have you sent for me? You dismissed me yesterday with something which you tried to make look and sound like anger—ineffectually, for you were not angry. And I was prepared

for the same line of tactics to-day. Well, you send for me. I am here. You come to me a thousand times more beautiful"—he dropped his voice to a whisper, and she grew pale under the fixed fire of his eyes,—“infinitely more beautiful than I have ever seen you; and in your eyes and in your smile there is what I have never seen in them; and yet you meet me with mere jesting words. Now, this you do not mean; what is it that you *do* mean?”

He rose, and leaned against the mantelpiece, looking down upon her bent head, with the light shining on the jewels in her hair. She did not speak.

“What is it that you *do* mean?” he repeated. She had laid one arm along the cushioned side of the sofa, the side near him. He clasped it, above the wrist, impressively, not caressingly, and at the touch, the words he had spoken to her before, “Would you not be afraid of a man who loved you with all the passion of his heart?” recurred to her, and she felt that so this man loved her, and that she was afraid of him.

“I dare say many others have loved you, and

told you so," he continued, "and I don't ask you how you received their professions. I know the world too well, and what it brings to men and women, for any such folly. That is of the past. The present is ours. I ask you why you have brought me here? A woman who resents such words as those I have spoken to you before now, does not give a man the chance of repeating them. You have not sent for me to tell me that you are insulted and outraged, to talk the cant of a hypocritical society to me. I should not love you, beautiful as you are, if you were such a fool."

He saw that his audacity was not without its charm for her; her head was raised now, and her dark eyes, looking up, met his looking down, as she listened, with parted lips and deep-drawn breath.

"Be sure of this," he said, "no man has ever loved you as I love you, or been willing to stake so much upon your love." The sinister truth which lurked in these words lent the sinister expression to his face again for a moment which she had sometimes seen in it. "How much I

stake upon it you will never know. So be it. I am ready, I am willing. You see I am giving you time. I am not hurrying you into rash speech. I dare say you were not at all prepared for this when you and I met, and you took the initiative in what you intended to be an ordinary watering-place flirtation—while you were waiting for Arthur Felton, perhaps?” he said, savagely, for, as he went on, the savage nature of the man was rising within him, and for all that his grasp was on her soft white arm, and his gaze was searching the depths of her dark eyes, he was speaking rather to himself than to her; rather to the unchained devil within, than to the beautiful fatality before him.

“It is possible you had some such notion,” he said. “I don’t ask you to acknowledge it, for if so, you have abandoned it.” He stooped lower, his eyes looked closer into hers. She shrank back, and covered her face with her disengaged hand. “Yes,” he went on, in a gentler tone, “I know you soon discovered that I am not made for make-believes; and now—now that you have sent for me, and I am here,

what is it that you mean? You *cannot* make me the pastime of an hour; you *cannot* shake off the hold which such love as mine lays upon your life—would still lay upon it were you a feebler woman than you are. What then? Are you going to take the wine of life, or are you going to content yourself with the vapid draughts you have hitherto drank? You must tell me, and tell me to-night, what it is you mean; for a crisis in my life has come, and I must know, without paltering or delay, how it is to be dealt with.”

He lifted his hand from her arm, and, standing directly before her, bade her look up and speak to him. She did not move. Then he sat down on a velvet footstool before her sofa, and drew her hands away from before her face. There were signs of agitation on it, and he read them, not quite correctly perhaps, but to his own satisfaction.

“Listen to me,” he said, in the gentlest tones within the compass of his voice. “I have a right—have I not?—to ask you, to know what is your meaning towards me? What did you bring me here for? Remember the words I have spoken to

you, not once only, or twice; remember the story I told you on the balcony yonder; remember the tone you have occasionally adopted in all your levity, and then do not attempt to deny my right to speak as I am speaking, and to demand your answer."

"You—you found me alone here—in my own house—and—"

"Absurd!" he cried. "You are talking nonsense, and you know it. Did you not intend me to understand that I should find you alone? Did your note, your summons (I tore it up, but you remember the words as well as I do), mean anything else? Do you not know this is all folly? There is no need to play with *me*. I am a sure prize, or victim, which you please; you know that well enough, and I must know which you *do* please, for this is, as I said before, a crisis for me. Which is it?" he said, and he held her hands more tightly, and looked at her with a pale face. "Which is it? Mere coquetry—a dangerous game with a man like me, I warn you—a game you won't find it possible to play; or—or the deep, deep love of a lifetime—the devotion which

will never swerve or falter—the passion which will blot out from your knowledge or your fears everything beyond itself.”

Weak, imaginative, without principle, easily ruled by strength, though a despot to weakness, the woman he addressed listened to him like one in a dream. Not until afterwards did a sense of being tricked and trapped come to her. Had her demeanour towards Routh really implied all this? Had she yielded to the rapacity for admiration, to the thirst for conquest, which had always dominated in her nature, once too often, and far too completely? This was precisely what she had done, and she had fallen into the hands of a stronger being than herself. In a blind vague, groping kind of way she felt this, and felt that she could not help or deliver herself, and felt it with something like fear, even while her imagination and her vanity were intoxicated by the mingling of defiance and pleading in his words, in his tones, and in his looks.

“You and I,” he went on, “would say to others, would say to each other in some of our moods, or would have said when first we met, that

no such thing as this all-sufficing love exists, but each of us knows well that it does, and may and *shall* be ours! This is what *I* mean. Again I ask you, what is *your* meaning in all this?"

"I don't know," she replied, releasing her hands, and rising. He allowed her to pass him, and to walk to the fireplace. She stood there, her radiant figure glittering in the lustre of the fire and the wax-lights. She stood there, her head bent, her hands before her, the fingers interlaced. After a minute, Routh followed her, and stood before her.

"Then you will not answer me—you will not tell me what your meaning was in sending for me to-night?" There was tenderness in his tone now, and the slight inflection of a sense of injury which rarely fails with a woman.

"Yes," she said, looking up full at him, "I will tell you. I wanted to let you know that I think of going away."

"Going away!" cried Routh, in unbounded amazement—"Going away! What do you mean?"

"Just what I say," she replied, recovering herself, and resuming her usual tone and manner

as soon as he released her from the spell of his earnestness and passion—"I am going away. I don't treat you quite so badly as you try to make out, you see, or I should not tell you about it, or consult you, or anything, but just go—go right away, you know, and make an end of it."

Routh's stern face flushed, and then darkened with a look which Harriet had learned to know, but which Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge had never seen. She did not see it now, and continued:

"I sent for you to tell you this. I don't like the place; I'm tired of it. It's too small, and yet every one comes here, and I'm talked of. Ah, you sneer! Well, I know. I remember all I have said about that, but it is one thing to be talked of in London or Paris, and quite another to be the object of the daily curiosity and the malice—"

"You mean the envy, don't you?" said Routh.

"No I don't, I mean the malice; well the envy, or the malice, or only the observation, if you like, of always the same people, whom I meet in always the same places. That is a part of my reason, but only a part. I don't like Mr. Felton,

I don't like Mr. Dallas ; less than any people in the world I choose to have them to spy and overlook me ; and—and—I don't want to be here when that man comes."

Routh stood before her quite silent.

"You know—you remember," she said with a smile, "Arthur Felton. By the bye, you need not make faces about my wearing his photograph any more, for I've lost it—lost it before I got home yesterday. In fact, I suspect he is in some trouble—perhaps in some disgrace—and I have no fancy for being here when he arrives, to have him quarrelling with me if I avoid him, and his father regarding me with horror if I don't ; so——" and here she knelt on the white rug and stretched out her hands to the fire, which shone reflected in her upraised eyes—"so I am going to——" She paused, tantalising him.

"To——?" he repeated after her, almost in a whisper.

"To London," she said ; and laughed and looked at him, and rose. "Now sit down, and let us talk it over, and be reasonable."

Still quite silent, Routh obeyed her. His

manner, his look was changed. He was thoughtful; but an air of relief had come upon him, as if unexpected help had reached him from an unforeseen quarter.

There was no light in the window, as Routh passed it by, returning to his lodgings. But there was a lamp in the hall, at which he lighted a candle, and went into the sitting-room.

Harriet was still sitting by the window; she did not raise or turn her head, and Routh thought she was sleeping. He went up close to her, and then she languidly opened her eyes and rose.

“Have you fallen asleep here, in the dark, Harriet?” said Routh, “and without a fire! How imprudent and unnecessary!”

“I am not cold,” she said; but she shivered slightly as she spoke. Routh took up a shawl which lay upon a chair and wrapped it round her. She looked at him, quietly but sharply.

“Don’t be afraid; I am all right to-night, Harry,” he said. “I’ve won a lot of money at the tables, and I’ve been thinking over what we

were saying this morning—” He paused a moment, and then went on with some constraint in his voice: “I think you are right so far, that the sooner we get away from this the better. I will consider the rest of the matter when we get to London.”

Harriet looked at him still, closely and sharply, but she said nothing.

“You are too tired to talk about anything to-night, Harry, I see,” said Routh, with good humour which did not sit on him very naturally, “so we will not talk. But would it be possible for you to be ready to start in the morning?”

“Yes,” said Harriet, quietly, and without showing the least surprise by voice or countenance, “I will have everything ready.”

Homburg von der Höhe was graced for only a few days longer by the beautiful American. Her pony-carriage and the gray ponies, the French groom, the luxurious wrappings, the splendid vision of satin, and lace, and jewels, all disappeared, and the Schwarzhild mansion was for a while desolate, until again occupied by the nu-

merous progeny of a rich and rusty Queen's counsel.

It was understood that Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge had returned to Paris. "Every season is the right season for Paris with those Americans," said a contemptuous Briton, who secretly held himself aggrieved by the abrupt departure of the handsome widow, who had never appeared more than conscious of his existence, certainly not interested in the fact; "it draws them like a loadstone."

"She has evidently heard nothing of Arthur," said Mr. Felton to his nephew, "or she would have sent us word."

He spoke timidly, and glanced at George with anxious eyes. George looked undisguisedly serious and troubled.

"I wish your letters had arrived, uncle," he replied. "I begin to fear we shall not see Arthur here; and—and to be sorry that so much time has been lost."

A week later George Dallas wrote to Harriet Routh from Paris as follows:

“Hôtel du Louvre, Paris, October.

“MY DEAR MRS. ROUTH,—I am here with my uncle. My mother and Mr. Carruthers are travelling more slowly. We are all to meet in London. Meantime a circumstance has occurred which may prove of great, and must be of some importance to Mr. Felton and to myself. I am compelled to ask your assistance, which I know you will give me with all your accustomed readiness and kindness.

“Accompanied by my uncle, I went this morning to a jeweller’s shop in the Rue de la Paix to order the bracelet you know of to be re-made for my mother. I had not previously undone the packet containing the gold band and the turquoises, which you sealed up and kept in your desk for me, since the day you gave it to me at Homburg. The things were wrapped up in letter-paper, you will remember. I opened the packet on the counter of the jeweller’s shop, shook the turquoises into a box he handed me for the purpose, and was holding up the gold band for him to examine, when my uncle, who was looking at the paper I had laid down, suddenly called to me,

and pointing to some writing on it—mere memoranda, apparently, of articles to be purchased (I enclose a correct copy) — exclaimed, ‘That is Arthur’s writing!’ I saw at once that it was his writing, and determined to apply to you in the first place for information on the matter. It is now clear that my cousin has passed under another name than his own, and that Routh and perhaps you have known him. There is a date, too, upon the paper—10th of April of this year. You took the paper out of the lower division of your desk. You may be able to tell us all that we have so long been anxious to know, at once. Pray answer this without delay. I think it best not to write to Routh, because my uncle and he are almost strangers, and also, dear Mrs. Routh, because it comes naturally to me to address myself to you. How strange that all this time you and Routh should have known Arthur, and I living in intimacy with you both, should have been in a manner seeking him! You will, no doubt, be able to tell us everything without an hour’s delay; but, in any case, we shall be in London in a week, and shall have Arthur’s portrait to show

you. I am sure this letter is very ill expressed, but I am still bewildered at the strangeness of the occurrence. Write at once. My room is No. 80.

“ Always yours affectionately,

“ GEORGE DALLAS.

“ P.S. The jeweller of the Rue de la Paix is a jewel among his tribe. He undertakes to replace the diamonds, and, as far as I can judge—to be sure, it’s only a little way—with stones just as fine as those I sold at A——, for a third less than the money his Hebrew Dutch *confrère* gave me. I had a mind to tell him the value of the original diamonds, but I didn’t—the honestest of jewellers is only human, and it might tempt him to raise the price and not the value. But I think he recognised a master-mind in my uncle.”

## CHAPTER V.

### MOVING ON.

UNCONSCIOUS of the inquietude of her brother and of her son, happy in a reunion which she had never ventured to hope for, still sufficiently weakened by her illness to be preserved from any mental investigation of "how things had come about," acquiescent and tranquil, Mrs. Carruthers was rapidly getting well. The indelible alteration which her beauty had sustained—for it was beauty still—the beauty of a decade later than when George had seen his mother through the ball-room window at Poynings—had touched her morally as well as physically; and a great calm had come upon her with the silver streaks in her rich dark hair, and the fading of the colour in her cheek.

The relation between George's mother and her husband had undergone an entire change.

Mr. Carruthers had been excessively alarmed when he first realised the nature of his wife's illness. He had never come in contact with anything of the kind, and novelty of any description had a tendency to alarm and disconcert Mr Carruthers of Poynings. But he was not in the least likely to leave any manifest duty undone, and he had devoted himself, with all the intelligence he possessed (which was not much), and all the heart (which was a great deal more than he or anybody else suspected), to the care, attention, and "humouring" which the patient required. From the first, Mrs. Carruthers had been able to recognise this without trying to account for it, and she unconsciously adopted the best possible method of dealing with a disposition like that of her husband. She evinced the most absolute dependence on him, an almost fretful eagerness for his presence, an entire forgetfulness of the former supposed immutable law which had decreed that the convenience and the pleasure of Mr. Carruthers of Poynings were to take precedence, as a matter of course, of all other sublunary things. Indeed, it was merely in a

technical sense that, as regarded the little world of Poynings, these had been considered sublunary. Its population concerned themselves infinitely less with the "principalities and powers" than with the accuracy of the temperature of Mr. Carruthers's shaving-water, and the punctuality with which Mr. Carruthers's breakfast, lunch, and dinner were served. It had never occurred to his loving and dutiful wife that any alteration in this principle of life at Poynings could possibly be effected, and thus the more superficial faults of the character of a genuinely worthy man had been strengthened by the irresponsibility of his position until they bade fair to overpower its genuine worth. But all this has changed now, changed in a fashion against which there was no appeal. Mr. Carruthers was no longer the first. His hours, his habits, his occupations, had to give way to the exigencies of a misfortune which struck him on the most sensitive point, and which invested him with a responsibility not to be trifled with or shared. It was characteristic of him that he became excessively proud of his care of his wife. The pomposity and importance with which he

had been wont to "transact his public business" was now transferred to his superintendence of his patient; and the surveillance and fussiness which had made life rather a burdensome possession to the household and retainers of Poynings impressed themselves upon the physicians and attendants promoted to the honour of serving Mrs. Carruthers. As they were, in the nature of things, only temporary inflictions, and were, besides, accompanied by remarkably liberal remuneration, the sufferers supported them uncomplainingly.

It was also characteristic of Mr. Carruthers that, having made up his mind to receive George Dallas well, he had received him very well, and speedily became convinced that the young man's reformation was genuine, and would be lasting. Also, he had not the least suspicion how largely he was influenced in this direction by Mark Felton's estimate of the young man—an estimate not due to ignorance either, for George had hidden nothing in his past career from his uncle except his acquaintance with Clare Carruthers, and the strange coincidence which connected him

with the mysterious murder of the 17th of April. Mr. Carruthers, like all men who are both weak and obstinate, was largely influenced by the opinions of others, provided they were not forced upon him or too plainly suggested to him, but that he was currently supposed to partake or even to originate them. He had not said much to his wife about her son; he had not referred to the past at all.

It was in his honourable, if narrow, nature to tell her frankly that he had recognised his error, that he knew now that all his generosity, all the other gifts he had given her, had not availed and could not have availed, while George's society had been denied; but the *consigne* was, "Mrs. Carruthers must not be agitated," and the great rule of Mr. Carruthers's life at present was, that the *consigne* was not to be violated. Hence, nothing had been said upon the subject, and after the subsidence of her first agitation, Mrs. Carruthers had appeared to take George's presence very quietly, as she took all other things.

The alteration which had taken place in his wife had tended to allay that unacknowledged ill

which had troubled Mr. Carruthers's peace, and exacerbated his temper. The old feeling of jealousy died completely out. The pale, delicate, fragile woman, whose mind held by the past now with so very faint a grasp, whose peaceful thoughts were of the present, whose quiet hopes were of the future, had nothing in common with the beautiful young girl whom another than he had wooed and won. As she was now, as alone she wished to be, he was first and chief in her life, and there was not a little exaction or temporary fretfulness, a single little symptom of illness and dependence, which had not in it infinitely more reassuring evidence for Mr. Carruthers than all the observance of his wishes, and submission to his domestic laws, which had formerly made it plainer to Mr. Carruthers of Poynings that his wife feared than that she loved him.

And, if it be accounted strange and bordering on the ludicrous that, at Mr. Carruthers's respectable age, he should still have been subject to the feelings tauntingly mentioned as the "vagaries" of love, it must be remembered that George's

mother was the only woman he had ever cared for, and that he had only of late achieved the loftier ideals of love. It was of recent date that he learned to hold his wife more dear and precious than Mr. Carruthers of Poynings.

He was not in the least jealous of George. He liked him. He was clever, Mr. Carruthers knew; and he rather disapproved of clever people in the abstract. He had heard, and had no reason to doubt—certainly none afforded by his step-son's previous career—that literary people were a bad lot. He supposed, innocent Mr. Carruthers, that, to be literary, people must be clever. The inference was indisputable. But George did not bore him with his cleverness. He never talked about the *Piccadilly* or the *Mercury*, reserving his confidences on these points for his mother and his uncle. The family party paired off a good deal. Mr. Carruthers and his wife, Mark Felton and his nephew. And then Mr. Carruthers had an opportunity of becoming convinced that the doubts he had allowed to trouble him had all been groundless, and to learn by experience that, happy in her son's society, truly

grateful to him for the kindness with which he watched George, she was happier still in his company.

To a person of quicker perception than Mr. Carruthers, the fact that the invalid never spoke of her faithful old servant would have had much significance. It would have implied that she had more entirely lost her memory than other features and circumstances of her condition indicated, or that she had regained sufficient mental firmness and self-control to avoid anything leading directly or indirectly to the origin and source of a state of mental weakness of which she was distressingly conscious. But Mr. Carruthers lacked quickness and experience, and he did not notice this. He had pondered in his stately way, over Dr. Merle's words, and he had become convinced that he must have been right. There had been a "shock." But of what nature? How, when, had it occurred? Clearly, these questions could not now, probably could not ever be, referred to Mrs. Carruthers. Who could tell him? Clare? Had anything occurred while he had been absent during the days immediately preceding his wife's

illness? He set himself now, seriously, to the task of recalling the circumstances of his return.

He had been met by Clare, who told him Mrs. Carruthers was not quite well. He had gone with her to his wife's room. She was lying in her bed. He remembered that she looked pale and ill. She was in her dressing-gown, but otherwise dressed. Then she had not been so ill that morning as to have been unable to leave her bed. If anything had occurred, it must have taken place after she had risen as usual. Besides, she had not been seriously ill until a day or two later—stay, until how many days? It was on the morning after Mr. Dalrymple's visit that he had been summoned to his wife's room; he and Clare were at breakfast together. Yes, to be sure, he remembered it all distinctly. Was the "shock" to be referred to that morning, then? Had it only come in aid of previously threatening indisposition? These points Mr. Carruthers could not solve. He would question Clare on his return, and find out what she knew, or if she knew anything. In the mean time, he would not mention the matter at all, not even to his wife's

brother or her son. Mr. Carruthers of Poynings had the "defects of his qualities," and the qualities of his defects, so that his pride, leading to arrogance in one direction, involved much delicacy in another, and this sorrow, this fear, this source, of his wife's suffering, whatever it might be, was a sacred thing for him, so far as its concealment from all hitherto unacquainted with it was concerned. Clare might help him to find it out, and then, if the evil was one within his power to remedy, it should be remedied; but, in the meantime, it should not be made the subject of discussion or speculation. Her brother could not possibly throw any light on the cause of his wife's trouble; he was on the other side of the Atlantic when the blow, let it have come from whatever unknown quarter, had struck her. Her son! Where had he been? And asking himself this question, Mr. Carruthers began to feel rather uncomfortably hot about the ears, and went creaking up the stairs to his wife's sitting-room, in order to divert his thoughts as soon as possible. He saw things by a clearer light now, and the recollection of his former conduct to George troubled him.

He found his step-son and Mark Felton in Mrs. Carruthers's room. The day was chilly and gloomy, and eminently suggestive of the advantages possessed by an English country mansion over the most commodious and expensive of foreign lodging-houses. George had just placed a shawl round his mother's shoulders, and was improving the fastenings of the windows, which were in their normal condition in foreign parts.

"Mark has been talking about Poynings," said Mrs. Carruthers, turning to her husband with a smile, "and says he never saw a place he admired more, though he had only a passing glimpse of it."

Mr. Carruthers was pleased, though of course it was only natural that Mr. Felton should never have seen any place more to be admired by persons of well-regulated taste than Poynings.

"Of course," he said, with modest admission, "if you come to talk about the Dukeries, and that kind of thing, there's nothing to be said for Poynings. But *it is* a nice place, and I am very fond of it, and so is Laura."

He was rather alarmed, when he had said this,

to observe his wife's eyes full of tears. Tears indicated recollection, and of a painful kind, he thought, being but little acquainted with the intricate symptoms of feminine human nature, which recollection must be avoided, or turned aside, in a pleasurable direction.

Now George's cleverness was a direction of the required kind, and Mr. Carruthers proceeded to remark that George must make drawings for his mother of all the favourite points of view at Poynings.

"There's the terrace, George," he said, "and the 'Tangle,' where your mother loves to spend the summer afternoons, and there's the beechwood, from the hill behind the garden, and the long avenue. There are several spots you will like, George, and—and," said Mr. Carruthers, magnanimously, and blushing all over his not much withered face, like a woman, "I'm only sorry you are to make acquaintance with them so late in the day."

He put out his hand, with true British awkwardness, as he spoke, and the young man took it respectfully, and with an atoning pang of shame and self-reproach. But for his mother's

presence, and the imperative necessity of self-restraint imposed by the consideration of her health and the danger of agitation to her, George would have inevitably told his step-father the truth. He felt all the accumulated meanness of an implied falsehood most deeply and bitterly, and might have been capable of forgetting even his mother, but for a timely warning conveyed to him by the compressed lips and frowning brows of his uncle. As for his mother, neither he nor Mr. Felton could judge of the effect produced upon her by the words of her husband. She had turned away her head as he began to speak.

“I was just going to tell Laura what I thought of doing, if you and she approve,” Mr. Felton hastened to say. “You see, I am getting more and more anxious about Arthur, and I don’t think he will turn up here. I thought if George and I were to go on to Paris and make some inquiries there—I know pretty well where he went to there, and what he did. We need not make more than a few days’ delay, and then go on to London, and join you and Laura there. What do you say?”

“I think it would do nicely,” said Mr. Carruthers. “You and George would hardly like our rate of travelling under any circumstances.” It would have afforded any individual endowed with good humour and a sense of the ludicrous great amusement to observe the pleasure and importance with which Mr. Carruthers implied the seriousness of his charge, and the immense signification of a journey undertaken by Mrs. Carruthers of Poynings. “We shall stay some time in town,” he continued, “for additional medical advice; and then, I hope, we shall all go down to Poynings together.”

“I have secured rooms for George and myself in Piccadilly,” said Mark Felton, in a skilfully off-hand manner. “It would never do for two jolly young bachelors like him and me to invade Sir Thomas Boldero’s house. Even”—and here Mr. Felton’s countenance clouded over, and he continued absently—“even if Arthur did not join us; but I hope he will—I hope he will.”

Mr. Carruthers was singularly unfortunate in any attempt to combine politeness with insincerity. He had a distinct conviction that his wife’s ne-

phew was a "good-for-nothing," of a different and more despicable order of good-for-nothingness from that which he had imputed to his step-son in his worst days; and though he would have been unfeignedly pleased had Mr. Felton's inquietude been set at rest by the receipt of a letter from his son, he was candidly of opinion that the longer that young gentleman abstained from joining the family party, the more peaceful and happy that family party would continue to be.

However, he endeavoured to rise to the occasion, and said he hoped "Mr. Arthur" would accompany his father to Poynings, with not so very bad a grace considering.

The diversion had enabled George to recover himself, and he now drew a chair over beside his mother's, and began to discuss the times and distances of their respective journeys, and other cognate topics of conversation. Mr. Carruthers liked everything in the planning and settling line, and it was quite a spectacle to behold him over the incomprehensible pages of Bradshaw, emphasising his helplessness with his gold spectacles.

"I suppose ten days will see us all in London,"

he said to Mr. Felton, "if you leave this with George to-morrow, and we leave on Monday. I have written to my niece. Sir Thomas and Lady Boldero never come to town at this season, so I have asked Clare to come up and see that the house is all comfortable for Laura. Clare can stay at her cousin's till we arrive."

"Her cousin's?" asked Mark Felton; and George blessed him for the question, for he did not know who was meant, and had never yet brought himself to make an inquiry in which Clare Carruthers was concerned, even by implication.

"Mrs. Stanhope, Sir Thomas's daughter," said Mr. Carruthers; "she was married just after we left Poynings."

"The young lady of whom Captain Marsh made such appropriate mention," thought George.

"I have no town-house," continued Mr. Carruthers, with more of the old pompous manner than Mr. Felton had yet remarked in him. "Laura prefers Poynings, so do I; and as my niece came down only this spring, and has been detained in the country by several causes, we have not thought it necessary to have one."

“I should think you would find a town-house a decided nuisance,” said Mr. Felton, frankly; “and if Miss Carruthers has Sir Thomas Boldero’s and Mrs. Stanhope’s to go to, I don’t see that she wants anything more.”

“You forget,” said Mr. Carruthers, in a quiet tone, which, nevertheless, conveyed to Mr. Felton’s quick apprehension that he had made a grave mistake, and implied to perfection the loftiness of rebuke—“you forget that Miss Carruthers is the heiress of Poynings!”

“Ah, to be sure, so I do,” said Mark Felton, heartily, “and I beg her pardon and yours; but at least I shall never forget that she is the most charming girl I ever saw in my life.” And then, as if a secret inspiration led him to put the question which George longed to hear and dared not ask, he said:

“When is Miss Carruthers to arrive in London?”

“Only three or four days before we shall get there, I fancy. My love,” turning abruptly to Mrs. Carruthers, as a happy idea struck him, by which her additional comfort might be secured,

“what would you think of my desiring Clare to bring Brookes up with her? Should you like to have her with you when you are in town?”

Mrs. Carruthers turned a face full of distress upon her husband in reply to his kind question. It was deeply flushed for a moment, then it grew deadly pale; her eyes rolled towards George with an expression of doubt, of searching, of misty anguish, which filled him with alarm, and she put out her hands with a gesture of avoidance.

“O no, no,” she said, “I cannot see her yet—I am not able—I don’t know—there’s something, there’s something.”

It might have struck Mr. Carruthers and Mark Felton too, had they not been too much alarmed to think of anything but Mrs. Carruthers’s emotion, that when they both approached her eagerly, George did not attempt to do so. He rose, indeed, but it was to push back his chair and get out of their way. Mr. Carruthers asked her tenderly what was the matter, but she replied only by laying her head upon his breast in a passion of tears.

In the evening, when Dr. Merle had seen Mrs.

Carruthers, had said a great deal about absolute quiet, but had not interdicted the purposed return to England, when it had been decided that there was to be no leave-taking between her and her brother and son, who were to commence their journey on the morrow, Mr. Carruthers, sitting by his wife's bed, where she then lay quietly asleep, arrived at the conclusion that the old nurse was connected with the "shock." The idea gave him acute pain. It must have been, then, something which had some reference to his wife's past life, something in which he and the present had no share. Very old, and worn, and troubled Mr. Carruthers looked as the darkness came on and filled the room, and once more the night wind arose, and whistled and shrieked over Taunus. He began to wish ardently, earnestly, to get home. It was very strange to look at his wife, always before his eyes, and know she had a terrible secret grief, which had thus powerfully affected her, and not to dare to question her about it. This fresh confirmation of the fact, this new manifestation of her sufferings, after so peaceful an interval, had in it something awful to the mind of Mr. Carruthers.

The brother and the son, in their different ways, were equally disturbed by the occurrence—Mark Felton in his ignorance and conjecture, George in the painful fulness of his knowledge and his self-reproach.

And as Mark Felton's look had alone arrested George's impulsive desire to reveal his knowledge of Poynings to Mr. Carruthers, so the remembrance of all Routh and Harriet had said to him of the difficulty, the embarrassment, the probable danger of an acknowledgment, alone arrested his desire to inform his uncle of the dreadful error which had caused his mother's illness.

Mark Felton and George Dallas left Hom-burg for Paris on the following day. They had separated for the night earlier than usual, and George had employed himself for some hours in writing a long and confidential letter to his friend Cunningham. It was addressed to that gentleman at the *Mercury* office, and it contained full details of every particular which he had been able to learn connected with his missing cousin. The purpose of the letter was an urgent request that Cunningham would at once communicate with the

police on this matter, and it concluded with these words:

“I cannot conquer my apprehensions, and I will not yet communicate them to my uncle. But, mark this, I am convinced we shall learn nothing good at Paris; and we have done very wrong in not putting the police to work long ago. Don't laugh at me, and call me a novelist in action. I never felt so sure of anything I had not seen as I am of Arthur Felton's having come to serious grief.”

## CHAPTER VI.

PAUL WARD.

THE autumn tints were rich and beautiful upon the Kent woods, and nowhere more rich or more beautiful than in Sir Thomas Boldero's domain. The soft grass beneath the noble beeches was strewn with the russet leaves a little earlier than usual that year, and somewhat more plentifully, for the storm had shaken them down, and had even rent away a branch here and there from some of the less sturdy trees. And then the forester made his inspection, and the fallen branches were removed, and duly cut and housed for winter firewood, and it chanced that the hitherto forgotten log on which George Dallas had sat one spring morning was carried away with them.

Clare Carruthers missed it from its accustomed place as she rode down the glade which she still loved, though it had a painful association for her

now. Every day her eyes had rested on the rugged log, and every day she had turned them away with a sigh. To-day it was there no longer, and its absence was a relief. She reined Sir Lancelot up for a moment, and looked at the vacant space. The earth lay bare and brown where the log had been; there was no grass there.

“It won’t be hidden until the spring,” she thought, impatiently. “I wish—I wish I could forget the place in which I saw him first! I wish I could forget that I ever had seen him!”

Then she turned her head away with an effort and a sigh, and rode on.

Clare was going over from the Sycamores to Poynings. She had occasion to see the house-keeper, started early, and, as usual, unattended, save by Cæsar, who bounded along now by the side of Sir Lancelot, anon a considerable way in advance, doing the distance twice over, after the fashion of dogs, and evidently compassionating the leisurely pace to which his equine friend and comrade was condemned.

The months which had elapsed since her inauspicious meeting among the beeches with Paul

Ward had had much inquietude and mysterious trouble in them for the girl whose graces they had but ripened and perfected, on whose fair face they had impressed a premature but very beautiful thoughtfulness. To one so young, so innocent, so carefully shielded from evil, living in so pure and calm an atmosphere of home, and yet around whom the inevitable solitude of orphanhood dwelt, the presence of a secret cause of sorrow, doubt, perplexity, was in itself a burden grievous to be borne. Clare could not help dwelling perpetually on the only mystery which had ever come into her tranquil conventional life, and the more she shrank from the contemplation, the more it pressed itself upon her. Sometimes, for days and weeks together, the remembrance of it would be vague and formless, then it would take shape again and substance, and thrill her with fresh horror, distract her with new perplexity. Sometimes she would address herself with all the force of her intelligence to this mysterious remembrance, she would arrange the circumstances in order and question them, and then she would turn away from the investigation cold and trembling, with all the ter-

rible conviction of the first moment of revelation forcibly restored.

The dreadful truth haunted her. When Sir Thomas Boldero asked her ladyship if there was any news in the *Times* each morning (for the Sycamores was governed by other laws than those which ruled Poynings, and Lady Boldero, who was interested in politics after her preserves and her linen-presses, always read the papers first), Clare had listened with horrid sickening fear for many and many a day. But suspense of this sort cannot last in its first vitality, and it had lessened, but it was not wholly dead even yet. One subject of speculation frequently occupied her. Had he seen the warning she had ventured to send him? No, she would sometimes say to herself, decisively, no, he had not seen it. His safety must have been otherwise secured; if he had seen it, he would know that the terrible truth was known to her, and he would never have dared to recall himself to her memory. For he did so recall himself, and this was the most terrible part of it all for Clare. On the first day of each month she received the current number of the *Piccadilly*, and there was

always written on the fly-leaf, "From Paul Ward." No, her attempt had failed; such madness, such audacity, could not otherwise be accounted for. For some time Clare had not looked at the books which reached her with this terribly significant imprint. She had not destroyed them, but she had put them away out of her sight. One day, after her cousin's marriage, and when her thoughts—forcibly distracted for some time by the preparations, the hospitalities, and the rejoicings attendant on that event—had flown back to the subject which had such tormenting attraction for her, a sudden impulse of utter incredulity seized her. Nothing was changed in the facts, nothing in the circumstances; but Clare laid aside reason under the suddenly exerted power of feeling, and refused to believe that Paul Ward had murdered the unknown man in whose company he had been, and who undoubtedly had been murdered.

*"I won't believe it! I don't believe it!"*

These words have often been uttered by the human will, when tortured by the terrible impotence of human despair, as unreasonably, as obstinately, as Clare Carruthers spoke them, and

with infinitely more suffering implied in the inevitable reaction. But they can seldom have brought greater relief. A generous, reckless impulse of youth, partly against the terrible knowledge of evil, partly against her own suffering, which wearied and oppressed her spirit, distant, vague, even chimerical, as she told herself it was, animated her resolution. She rose, and stretched her arms out, and shook her golden head, as though she discarded a baleful vision by a strong act of her will.

“I shall never see him again,” she thought. “I shall never know his fate, unless, indeed, he becomes famous, and the voice of his renown reaches me. I shall never know the truth of this dreadful story; but, strong as the evidence is, I never will believe it more. Never, never!”

Clare Carruthers was too young, too little accustomed to the sad science of self-examination, too candidly persuadable by the natural abhorrence of youth for grief, to ask herself how much of this resolution came from the gradual influence of time—how much from the longing she felt to escape from the constant pressure of the first misery she

had ever known. The impulse, the resolution, had come to her, with her first waking thoughts, one glorious morning in the early autumn—the morning which saw George Dallas and his uncle arrive at Homburg, and witnessed Mr. Carruthers's reception of his step-son. This resolution she never abandoned. That day she had taken the books out of their hiding-place, and had set herself to read the serial story which she knew was written by him. Something of his mind, something of his disposition, would thus reveal itself to her. It was strange that he remembered to send her the books so punctually, but that might mean nothing; they might be sent by the publisher, by his order. He might have forgotten her existence by this time. Clare was sensible, and not vain, and she saw nothing more than a simple politeness in the circumstance. So she read the serial novel, and thought over it; but it revealed nothing to her. There was one description, indeed, which reminded her, vaguely, of Mrs. Carruthers, as she had been before her illness, as Clare remembered her, when she had first seen her, years ago. Clare liked the story. She was not enthusiastically delighted with it. A

change which her newly formed resolution to believe him innocent, to chase from her all that had tormented her, could never undo, had passed upon Clare, since her girlish imagination had been ready to exalt Paul Ward, "the author," Paul Ward, "the artist," as she had called him, with all the reverence her innocent heart accorded to such designations, into a hero; she had less impulse in her now, she had suffered, in her silent unsuspected way, and suffering is a sovereign remedy for all enthusiasm except that of religion. But she discerned in the story something which made her reason second her resolution. And from that day Clare grieved no more. She waited, she did not know for what; she hoped, she did not know why; she was pensive, but not unhappy. She was very young, very innocent, very trustful; and the story of the murder was six months old. So was that of the meeting, and that of the myrtle-sprig; and all three were growing vague.

The young girl's thoughts were very busy as she rode from the Sycamores to Poynings, but not exclusively with Paul Ward.

Her life presented itself in a more serious as-

pect to her then than it had ever before worn. All things seemed changed. Her uncle's letters to her had undergone a strange alteration. He wrote now to her as to one whom he trusted, to whom he looked for aid, on whom he purposed to impose a responsible duty. The pompousness of Mr. Carruthers's nature was absolutely inseparable from his style of writing as from his manner of speech, but the matter of his letters atoned for their faults of manner. He wrote with such anxious affection of his wife, he wrote with such kindly interest of Mr. Dallas, the hitherto proscribed step-son, whose name Clare had never heard pronounced by his lips or in his presence. Above all, he seemed to expect very much from Clare. Evidently her life was not to be empty of interest for the future, if responsibility could fill it; for Clare was to be intrusted with all the necessary arrangements for Mrs. Carruthers's comfort, and Mrs. Carruthers was very anxious to get back to England, to Poyning's, and to Clare! The girl learned this with inexpressible gladness, but some surprise. She was wholly unaware of the feelings with which Mrs. Carruthers had regarded her, and the inten-

tions of maternal care and tenderness which she had formed—feelings she had hidden, intentions she had abandoned from motives of prudence founded on her thorough comprehension of the besetting weakness of her husband's character.

Clare had not the word of the enigma, and it puzzled her. But it delighted her also. Instinctively she felt there was something of Mark Felton's doing in this. He had impressed her as favourably as she had impressed him. She had recognised his possession of the two great qualities, feeling and intelligence, and her own kindred endowments had answered to them at once.

Was she going to be happy and useful? Was she going to be something more than the rich Miss Carruthers, the heiress of Poynings, who had every luxury life could supply except that of feeling herself of active individual importance to any living creature? Was Poynings going to be as pleasant as the Sycamores, and for a more worthy reason? Clare felt in her honest young heart that the superiority of the Sycamores consisted principally in the fact that the uncle who inhabited that abode was never in

her way, whereas the uncle who ruled at Poynings was generally otherwise, and unpleasant. It was very ungrateful of her to feel this; but she did feel it. Was all this going to be altered? Was she going to have the sort of feeling that might have been hers if she had not been the heiress of Poynings, but the real, own daughter of a kind lady who needed and would accept all her girlish love and eager, if unskilful, care? It must be so, Clare thought, now Mrs. Carruthers had her son with her, and she no longer felt that there was injustice done to her, for which Clare was made the reason or the pretext, she would allow her to be all she had always desired to be. How much uselessness, unreality, weariness, fell away from Clare Carruthers as she rode on, the beautiful healthful colour rising higher in her cheeks as the glad thoughts, the vague, sweet, unselfish hopes of the future, expanded in her young heart! She would tell Mrs. Carruthers some day when she was quite well, when there should be no longer any danger of doing her harm by the revelation, about the mystery which had caused her so much suffer-

ing, and then, when there should be perfect confidence between them, she would tell her how she had discovered that she, too, was acquainted with Paul Ward.

Clare had never speculated seriously upon the cause of Mrs. Carruthers's illness. Her first convictions were, that it had originated in some trouble about her son. The old housekeeper's manner, the removal of the portrait, had sufficed for Clare. This was a sacred sorrow, sacred from Clare's curiosity, even in her thoughts. And now it was at an end, probably thanks to Mark Felton; but, at all events, it was quite over. In the time to come, that future which Clare's fancy was painting so brightly, as her horse carried her swiftly over the familiar road, Mrs. Carruthers might even love her well enough to tell her the story of the past, and what that terrible grief had been.

"I am to take Thomas up to town with me, Mrs. Brookes, and I only wish you were coming too," said Clare to the housekeeper at Poynings, as a concluding item of the budget of news she

had to tell. Clare was in high spirits by this time. Mrs. Brookes was much more friendly than usual to the young lady, whom she, too, had always regarded with jealousy, and almost dislike, as the enemy of George.

“I am better here, Miss Carruthers,” said Mrs. Brookes. “I daresay there won’t be much delay in London—for Mrs. Carruthers and master, I mean. You’ll stay awhile with Mrs. Stanhope, belike?”

“O dear no—I certainly shall not,” replied Clare, with the prettiest air of importance. “I shall come down with my uncle and aunt. My uncle says we are to come as soon as the doctors will let us go.”

“And Mr. Felton, also, you say, Miss Carruthers?”

“Yes, and Mr. Dallas. How delighted I am, Mrs. Brookes—how delighted you must be!” The girl’s face flushed deeply. She was all glowing with the generous ardour of her feelings. She had taken off her hat, and was standing before the open window in the morning-room, her habit gathered up in one hand, her slight figure trembling, her beautiful face radiant.

“I am sure it has been almost as hard for you as for his mother. I could not say anything about it before, Nurse Ellen”—it was the first time Clare had ever called the old woman by this name—“because—because I knew nothing—no one ever told me anything, and I must have seemed to blame my uncle. But, indeed, it pained me very much, and now—now I am so happy!”

Bright swift tears sparkled in her golden-brown eyes. She dashed them away, and, taking the old woman’s hands in hers, she said, with girlish archness,

“You must not hate me any more, Nurse Ellen, for ‘Master George’ and I are going to be very good friends.”

“Hate you, my dear young lady!” said Mrs. Brookes, who was too old to blush externally, but who certainly felt like blushing. “How can you have such fancies? Who could hate *you?*”

“You—you dear, faithful old thing! But it’s all right now; and, Nurse Ellen,” she said, seriously, “I am sure we owe all this happy

change to Mr. Felton. The moment I saw that man, I felt he had come to do good. By the bye, my uncle tells me there is no news of Mr. Felton's son yet. I suppose you never saw him, nurse?"

"La, bless you, no, my dear. I never saw his father till the day he came here. Mr. Arthur was born in America."

"Did he ever come to England before? Did Mrs. Carruthers ever see him?"

"Never. He told his father he would see his aunt the first thing he did, and he never came anigh the place. I doubt he's a black sheep, Miss Carruthers."

"I hope not, for his father's sake, nurse."

And then Clare proceeded to make various arrangements with Mrs. Brookes, thinking the while: "Arthur Felton never was here. Mrs. Carruthers never saw him. For a moment I fancied he might have been Paul Ward."

"I wonder what I shall think of George Dallas?" thought Clare as she rode away from Poynings in the afternoon, having given Thomas the necessary orders. "I wonder what he will

think of me? I dare say he does not like the idea of me much. Perhaps *I* should not like the idea of *him*, if he were in my place and I in his; but, as it is, *I decidedly do.*”

Attended by her maid and Thomas, Miss Carruthers went to London on the following day. Mrs. Stanhope met her at the railway station, and took her home with her. The footman was despatched to Sir Thomas Boldero's house in Chesham-place. In the course of the evening he went to Mrs. Stanhope's house, and asked to see Clare. His errand was to inform her that Mr. Felton and Mr. Dallas had arrived in London, and were particularly desirous of seeing Miss Carruthers. He (Thomas) had Mr. Felton's orders to ascertain from Miss Carruthers whether she would see them, on the following day, at Chesham-place, and if so, at what hour. He was to take her answer to Mr. Felton's lodgings in Piccadilly.

“When did the gentlemen arrive?” Miss Carruthers asked.

Thomas could not say exactly, but he thought

they had only just reached London, They had overcoats on, and looked "travellers-like."

Clare sent word to Mr. Felton that she would be at Chesham-place at noon on the next day, and would be very happy to see him. She did not mention Mr. Dallas, but it was by no means necessary she should do so.

Punctually at twelve on the following day, Mrs. Stanhope's brougham deposited Clare Carruthers at Sir Thomas Boldero's house. It was in process of preparation for the expected guests; but had not quite thrown off the drowsy unoccupied look of a house whose owners are absent. Its appearance bore the same relation to the state it would assume by and bye as that of an individual who has just persuaded himself to rise, and is yawning and shivering in the process, bears to that of the same individual in his tubbed, dressed, shaved, breakfasted, newspaper-read, hatted, gloved, and ready-for-the-day condition.

Clare got out of the carriage, gave the coachman some directions, stood at the door until he had driven off, and made a remark or two (ever reminiscent of Poynings punctiliousness) relative

to the area-railings and door-steps to Thomas before she entered the house. He listened gravely, promised to attend to these matters, and then said :

“ Mr. Dallas has been here some time, ma’am.”

“ Indeed !” said Clare, pausing just inside the hall-door. “ Is Mr. Felton not here ?”

“ He will be here directly, ma’am. He came with Mr. Dallas, but went away again. I showed Mr. Dallas into the study, ma’am.”

Clare felt rather embarrassed. She wished Mrs. Stanhope had been with her—she wished Mr. Felton had remained until she came, or had taken his nephew with him. It was so awkward to have to introduce herself to George Dallas, a stranger, and yet not exactly a stranger. She hesitated ; her colour rose. What should she do ? What was not the easiest or pleasantest thing to do—for that would be to go to the drawing-room and remain there until Mr. Felton should come, leaving Mr. Dallas to a similar vigil in the study—but the kindest. Clearly, to give Mrs. Carruthers’s son the friendliest greeting in her power, to show him, in her little way, how

pleased she was at the family reunion, how much she desired to be numbered among his friends.

The study windows faced the street; he had probably seen the carriage, and heard her voice. He might be even now hurt by her tarrying.

Clare delayed no longer. She crossed the hall, opened the door of Sir Thomas Boldero's study, saw a man's figure close to one of the windows, shut the door, took two or three steps, and said, in the sweet gentle tone which was one of her peculiar charms:

“Mr. Dallas, I am so much pleased.”

Then the figure turned away from the window, and Clare found herself in the presence of Paul Ward.

## CHAPTER VII.

### ANOTHER RECOGNITION.

THE same day which had witnessed the departure from Homburg of Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers, and the commencement of the journey which had London for its destination, beheld that city in an unusually agreeable aspect in point of weather. The sun was warm and bright; the sadness and sweetness of autumn filled the air, and lent their poetical charm to the prosaic streets, and impressed themselves sensibly and unacknowledged upon the prosaic dwellers therein. People who had no business or pleasure, or combination of both, to call them abroad, went out on that day, and rode or drove or walked, because the rare beauty and charm of the day imperatively required such homage. Women and children were out in the Parks, and, but for the fallen leaves upon the ground, and the peculiar sigh

which made itself heard now and again among the trees—a sound which the ear that has once learned to distinguish it never fails to catch when the summer is dead—the summer might be supposed to be still living.

The brightest thoroughfare in London, Piccadilly, was looking very bright that autumn day, with all the windows of the few houses which can lay claim to anything of the beauty of grandeur glittering in the sun, and an astounding display of carriages, considering the season, enlivening the broad sloping road. The Green Park was dotted over with groups of people, as in the summer-time, and along the broad path beyond the iron railings solitary pedestrians walked or loitered, unmolested by weather, just as it suited their fancy. The few and far-between benches had their occupants, of whom some had books, some cigars, and some babies. Perambulators were not wanting, neither were irascible elderly gentlemen to swear at them. It was happily too hot for hoops.

This exceptional day was at its best and brightest when Harriet Routh came down the

street in which she lived, crossed Piccadilly, and entered the Park. She was, as usual, very plainly dressed, and her manner had lost none of its ordinary quietude. Nevertheless, a close observer would have seen that she looked and breathed like a person in need of free fresh air, of movement, of freedom; that though the scene, the place in which she found herself, was indifferent to her, perhaps wholly unobserved by her, the influence upon her physical condition was salutary. She did not cross the grass, but walked slowly, and with her eyes turned earthwards, along the broad path near the railings. Occasionally she looked up, and lifted her head, as if to inhale as much as possible of the fresh air, then fell into her former attitude again, and continued her walk. Her face bore an expression of intense thought—the look of one who had brought a subject out with her in her mind, which subject she was resolved to think out, to look at in every aspect, to bring to a final decision. She kept a straight, clear course in her walk, looking neither to the right nor to the left, pondering deeply, as might have been seen by the

steady tension of her low white forehead and the firm set of her lips. At last she paused, when she had traversed the entire length of the walk several times, and looked about her for an unoccupied seat. She descried one, with no nearer neighbour than the figure of a boy, not exactly ragged, but very shabby, extended on the grass beside it, resting on his elbows, with a fur cap pulled down over his eyes, leaving the greater portion of a tangled head exposed to view, and a penny illustrated journal, whose contents, judging by the intentness with which he was devouring them, must have been of a highly sensational character, stretched out on the ground before him. Harriet took no notice of the boy, nor did he perceive her, when she seated herself on the bench by which he lay. She sat down noiselessly, folded her hands, and let her head fall forward, looking out with the distant absorbed gaze which had become habitual to her. She sat very still, and never for a moment did the purpose in her face relax. She was thinking, she was not dreaming.

After a while, she looked at her watch, and rose. At the first step which she made on the

grass, and towards the railings, her silk dress rustled over the outspread paper from which the boy was reading. She looked down, apologetically; the boy looked up angrily, and then Mr. James Swain jumped up, and made the movement which in his code of manners passed for a bow to Harriet.

“Ah, is it you, Jim?” she said. “Are you not busy to-day?”

“No, mum, I ain’t,” said Jim. “Mr. Routh hadn’t no messages this mornin’, and I ain’t been lucky since.”

“It’s a nice day for you to have a little time to yourself,” said Harriet. “I hope you got all the commissions I left for you.”

“I did, mum, and thank’ee,” said Jim. Harriet had remembered the street-boy when she was leaving home, and had charged her servants to employ him. She had not the slightest suspicion of the extensive use which Routh was in the habit of making of his services.

“The windows is to be cleaned,” said Jim, suggestively. “There warn’t time, mum; you come home so unexpected.”

“Very well,” said Harriet. “I suppose you can clean them, can’t you?”

“Mr. Harris said as I might try,” returned Jim. Mr. Harris was the irreproachable manservant attached to Routh’s modest establishment in Mayfair.

Harriet moved on, and Jim Swain stood still, looking after her. She was a puzzle to him, and an object of constant interest. By little and little Jim had come to know a good deal about Stewart Routh and his daily life, and he had abandoned the first theory which had presented itself to his mind, and which had owed its inspiration to the illustrated penny literature which formed his intellectual food. He no longer believed Harriet a persecuted victim of her husband’s groundless jealousy. For reasons of his own, equally strong and secret, Mr. James Swain had taken a lively interest in George Dallas, had experienced certain emotions on seeing him, and had taken very kindly to the business of espionage in which Routh had engaged his services, without affording him any indication of its purpose. At first the boy had conceived an idea that Dallas was the object

of Harriet's supposed preference and Routh's supposed jealousy, but he abandoned that notion very speedily, and since then he had not succeeded in forming any new theory to his satisfaction. From the conversation of the servants, Jim had learned that Mr. Dallas and Mr. Felton, with whose personal appearance the boy was equally familiar, had gone to the same place in foreign parts as that to which Mr. and Mrs. Routh had gone a little later, and knowing this, Jim thought more and more frequently over certain circumstances which he had kept to himself with extraordinary discretion—discretion, indeed, which nothing but the strongest possible sense of self-interest, as inseparable from its observance, could have enabled him to preserve.

“He don't like him,” Jim would say to himself, with frequent repetition, “he don't like him, can't abear him; I knows that precious well. And he can't be afraid of him, as I can see, for he certainly warn't neither in nor near *that* business, and I'm blest if he knows anythin' about it. Wotever can he want to know all about him for, and keep a-follerin' him about? It ain't for no

good as *he* follers anybody, I'll take my davy." And Mr. James Swain's daily reflections invariably terminated with that formula, which was indeed a simple and accurate statement of the boy's belief. His abandonment of his theories concerning Harriet had worked no change in his mind towards Routh. His familiarity with Routh's servants, his being in a manner free of the house—free, but under the due amount of inspection and suspicion justified by his low estate—enlightened him as to Harriet's domestic position, and made him wonder exceedingly, in his half-simple, half-knowing way, how "the like of her could be spoony on sich a cove as him," which was Mr. James Swain's fashion of expressing his sense of the moral disparity between the husband and wife.

This was the second time that Jim had seen Mrs. Routh since her return from the trip which he had been told was specially undertaken for the benefit of her health. The first time was on the day of her arrival, when Jim had fortunately been "handy," and had helped with the luggage. He had made his observations then upon Harriet's

appearance with all his native impudence ; for though the element of suspicion, which lent his interest in Harriet something tragic, had died out of it, that interest continued lively, but he had admitted that it was pardonable that she should look “precious blue and funky” after a journey.

But looking at her more attentively on this second occasion, and when there was no journey in the case, Jim arrived at the conclusion that whatever had “ailed” Mrs. Routh before she left home ailed her still.

“Uncommon ill she do look, to be sure,” he said to himself, as he crumpled up the exciting fiction which he had been reading, and which “left off” at a peculiarly thrilling crisis, and wedged the illustrated journal into his cap ; “uncommon ill. Wot’s the good of all them baths and things, if she’s to come back lookin’ like this—a deal worse, *I* call it, and much miserabler in her mind ? Wötever ails her ?”

At this point in his cogitations Jim began to move on, slowly indeed, and keeping his eye on Harriet, who had reached one of the gates of the

Park opening into Piccadilly, had passed through it, and was just about to cross to the opposite side. She stood for a moment irresolute, then turned, came through the gate again, and rapidly approached Jim, beckoning him towards her as she came.

She stood still as the boy ran up to her, and pointed to one of the smaller but much decorated houses on the opposite side of the way.

“Jim,” she said, “you see that house, where the wide windows are, all one pane, and the bright balconies there, the house with the wide door, and the heavy carved railings?”

“Yes, mum, I see,” said Jim.

“Go to that house, and ask if anything has been heard from Mr. Felton. Ask when he is expected—he has taken lodgings there—whether any other gentleman is expected to come with him—and, Jim, be sure to ask in particular whether any letters have been received for Mr. Felton, and sent on to him.”

Jim Swain looked at Harriet. There was something strange as well as intelligent in the look, but she saw only the intelligence. It har-

monised with the thought in her own mind, and she replied to it :

“ You think, perhaps, they may not like to tell you,” she said. “ Perhaps they may not. But you may tell whoever answers you that Mr. Felton’s sister wishes to know—” Jim still looked at her, and Harriet felt that he did so, but this time she did not catch his eye. “ Be quick,” she said, “ and bring me the answer yonder.” She pointed to the bench on which she had been sitting, and which was beyond the reach of observation from the house she had indicated, and walked away towards it as she ceased speaking. “ It cannot be helped,” she said. “ The risk is a trifling one at worst, and must be run. I could not put Harris in communication with any one on a false pretext, and I can trust this boy so far not to say he has asked this question for me. I cannot bear it any longer. I must know how much time there is before me. I *must* have so much certainty ; if not, I shall go mad.”

She had reached the bench now, and sat down in the former attitude.

“ Once before I asked myself,” she muttered,

“if I was going mad. I did not feel more like it then than now—not so like it, indeed. I knew what he was doing then, I had found him out. But I don’t know now—I don’t know now. I am in the dark, and the tide is rising.”

Jim came back from his errand. He had been civilly answered by a woman-servant. Mr. Felton was expected in a few days; the exact day was not yet named. No letters had been received for him. He had sent no orders relative to the forwarding of any. Having delivered his message so far, Jim Swain hesitated. Harriet understood the reticence, and spared a momentary thought for passing wonderment at this little touch of delicacy in so unpromising a subject for the exhibition of the finer emotions.

“Did the person who answered you ask you any question?” she said.

“No, mum,” said Jim, relieved. Harriet said no more, she knew he had not made the false statement which had proved to be needless, and something assured her that there was no necessity that she should caution Jim to say nothing concerning this commission. Now she went away

in reality—went home. She ascended the stairs to her room, and looked at her face in a glass as she took her bonnet off, and thought, “I wonder if people can see in my face that I am turning into a coward, and am going mad? I could not knock at that door and ask that simple, natural question for myself—*I could not*; and a little while ago, *since—ay, long since*—I could have done anything. But not now—not now. When the time comes, when the waiting is over, when the suspense is ended, then I may be strong again, if indeed I am not quite mad by then; but now—now I cannot do anything—I cannot even *wait*.”

The fixed look had left her face, and was succeeded by a painful wildness, and an expression almost like that of some present physical terror. She pressed her hands upon her temples and rocked herself to and fro, but there was no wild abandonment of grief in the gesture. Presently she began to moan, but all unconsciously; for catching the sound after a little, she checked it angrily. Then she took up some needlework, but it dropped from her hands after a few minutes.

She started up, and said, quite aloud, "It's no use—it's no use; I *must* have rest!" Then she unlocked her dressing-case, took out a bottle of laudanum, poured some of the contents into a glass of water, drank the mixture, and lay down upon her bed. She was soon in a deep sleep, which seemed peaceful and full of rest. It was undisturbed. A servant came into the room, but did not arouse her, and it was understood in the house that "master" would probably not return to dinner.

Mr. James Swain turned his steps in the direction of the delectable region in which his home was situated. He was in so far more fortunate than many of his class that he had a home, though a wretched one. It consisted of a dingy little room at the back of the third story in a rickety house in Strutton-ground, and was shared with a decrepid female, the elder sister of the boy's dead mother, who earned a frightfully insufficient subsistence by shoe-binding. More precarious than ever was this fragile means of living now, for her sight was failing, as her strength had failed. But things had been looking up with

Jim of late, odd jobs had been plenty, his services had reached in certain quarters the status of recognised facts, and the street-boy was kind to his old relative. They were queer people, but not altogether uninteresting, and, strange to say, by no means unhappy. Old Sally had never been taught anything herself but shoe-binding, or she would have imparted instruction to Jim. Now Jim had learned to read in his mother's lifetime, and before his father had "come to grief" and been no more heard of, and it was consequently he who imparted instruction to his aunt. She was as fond of penny romances as the boy himself, and was wonderfully quick at discovering the impenetrable mysteries and unwinding the labyrinthine webs of those amazing productions. So Jim, cheered by the prospect of a lucrative job for the morrow, purchased a fresh and intensely horrible pennyworth by the way, and devoted himself for the evening to the delectation of old Sally, who liked her murders, as she liked her tea and her snuff, strongly flavoured.

The pennyworth lasted a good while, for Jim read slowly and elaborately, and conversational

digressions occurred frequently. The heroine of the story, a proud and peerless peeress, was peculiarly fascinating to the reader and the listener.

“Lor, Jim,” said old Sally, when the last line had been spelled over, and Jim was reluctantly obliged to confess that that was “all on it”—“lor, Jim, to think of that sweet pretty creetur, Rorer,”—the angelic victim of the story was known to mortals as Aurora,—“knowing as how her ladyship ’ad been and done it all, and dyin’ all alone in the moonshine, along o’ thinkin’ on her mother’s villany.”

Ordinarily, when Jim Swain lay down on his flock bed in the corner, he went to sleep with enviable rapidity; but the old woman’s words had touched some chord of association or wonder in his clumsily arranged but not unintelligent mind; so that long after old Sally, in her corner of her little room, was sound asleep, Jim sat up hastily, ran his hands through his tangled hair, and said aloud:

“Good Lord! that’s it! *She’s sure* she knows it, she knows he did it, and she hidin’ on it, and kiverin’ of it up, and it’s killing her.”

The stipulated hour in the morning beheld

Jim Swain engaged in the task of window-cleaning, not very unpleasant in such weather. He pursued his occupation with unusual seriousness; the impression of the previous night remained upon him.

The back parlour, called, of course, the "study" in Routh's house, deserved the name as much or as little as such rooms ordinarily merit it. The master of the house, at least, used the room habitually, reading there a little, and writing a great deal. He had been sitting before a bureau, which occupied a space to the right of the only window in the apartment, for some time, when Harriet came to ask him if the boy, who was cleaning the windows, might go on with that one.

"Certainly," said Routh, absently; "he won't disturb me."

It would have required something of more importance than the presence of a boy on the other side of the window to disturb Routh. He was arranging papers with the utmost intentness. The drawers of the bureau were open on either side, the turned-down desk was covered with

papers, some tied up in packets, others open; a large sheet, on which lines of figures were traced, lay on the blotting-pad. The dark expression most familiar to it was upon Stewart Routh's face that morning, and the tightly compressed lips never unclosed for a moment as he pursued his task. Jim Swain, on the outside of the window, which was defended by a narrow balcony and railing, could see him distinctly, and looked at him with much eagerness while he polished the panes. It was a fixed belief with Jim that Routh was always "up to" something, and the boy was apt to discover confirmation in the simplest actions of his patron. Had another observer of Routh's demeanour been present, he might, probably, have shared Jim's impression; for the man's manner was intensely preoccupied. He read and wrote, sorted papers, tied them up, and put them away, with unremitting industry.

Presently he stretched his hand up to a small drawer in the upper compartment of the bureau; but, instead of taking a paper or a packet from it, he took down the drawer itself, placed it on the desk before him, and began to turn over its con-

tents with a still more darkly frowning face. Jim, at the corner of the window furthest from him, watched him so closely that he suspended the process of polishing; but Routh did not notice the cessation. Presently he came upon the papers which he had looked for, and was putting them into the breast-pocket of his coat, when he struck the drawer with his elbow, and knocked it off the desk. It fell on the floor, and its contents were scattered over the carpet. Among them was an object which rolled away into the window, and immediately caught the attention of Jim Swain. The boy looked at it, through the glass, with eyes in which amazement and fear contended. Routh picked up the contents of the drawer, all but this one object, and looked impatiently about in search of it. Then Jim, desperately anxious to see this thing nearer, took a resolution. He tapped at the window, and signed to Routh to open it and let him in. Routh, surprised, did so.

“Here it is, sir,” said Jim, not entering the room, but sprawling over the window-sill, and groping with his long hands along the border of a rug which sheltered the object of Routh’s search

from his observation—"here it is, sir. I see it when it fell, and I knowed you couldn't see it from where you was."

The boy looked greedily at the object in his hand, and rolled it about once or twice before he handed it to Routh, who took it from him with a careless "Thank you." His preoccupied manner was still upon him. Then Jim shut down the window again from the outside, and resumed his polishing. Routh replaced the drawer. Jim tried very hard to see where he placed the object he had held for a moment in his hand, but he could not succeed. Then Routh locked the bureau, and, opening a door of communication with the dining-room, Jim caught a momentary sight of Harriet sitting at the table, and went to his breakfast.

The seriousness of the previous night had grown and deepened over the boy. Abandoning the pursuit of odd jobs precisely at the hour of the day when he usually found them most plentiful, Jim took his way homewards with headlong speed. Arrived within sight of the wretched houses, he paused. He did not wish any one to see what he

was going to do. Fortune favoured him. As he stood irresolute at one end of the narrow street, his aunt came out of the door. She was going, he knew, to do her humble shopping, which consisted, for the most part, in haggling with costermongers by the side of their carts, and cheapening poor vegetables at the stalls. She would not be coming back just yet. He waited until she had turned the opposite corner, and then plunged into the open doorway and up the dark staircase. Arrived at the room which formed his sole habitation, Jim shut the door, and unceremoniously pulled away his flock bed, rolled up neatly enough in a corner, from the wall. This wall was covered with a paper once gaudy, now dreary with the utter dreariness of dirt charged on bright colour, and had a wooden surbase about a foot in depth. Above the surbase there was a hole, not so large as to be easily remarked in a place where dilapidation of every sort was the usual state of things, and into this hole Jim insinuated his hand. There was suggestive dexterity in the way he did this; the lithe fingers had suppleness and readiness, swiftness and accuracy of touch, which, if

there had been any one to care for the boy, that one would doubtless have noticed with regret. If he were not already a thief, Jim Swain possessed some of the physical requisites for that profession. Presently he withdrew the lithe hand, and looked steadfastly at the object which it had extracted from the hole in the wall. He turned it over and over, he examined it within and without, then he put it back again in the hiding-place, and replaced his bed.

Old Sally was much surprised, when she returned from her "marketing," to find her nephew at home. The apparition of Jim in the daytime, except on stray occasions, when, fortune being unpropitious, he would come home to see what his aunt could do for him in the way of dinner, was exceedingly rare. But he explained it now by saying he was tired, and had been well paid for a job he had done that morning. He proposed that he should get something choice that day for dinner, and stay "in" until evening.

"There's a new play at the 'Delphi to-night," said Jim, "and there'll be plenty of jobs down that way, callin' cabs and helpin' visitors to the hup-

per circles, as can't afford 'em, across the street. They're awful bewildered, mostly, when they come out of the theayter, and dreadful timid of the 'busses."

Very silent, and apparently sleepy, was Mr. James Swain all day; and as his old aunt sat patiently toiling by the window, he lay upon his bed, with his knees up, and his hands crossed on the top of his tousled head. Allowing for the difference created by refinement, education, and the habit of thinking on a system, only possible to the educated, there was some resemblance in the expression of the boy's face to that which Harriet Routh's had worn yesterday, when she had carried the burden of her thoughts, under the clear sky and the sunshine, in the Green Park. Jim Swain, too, looked as if he alone, unaided as she, was thinking it out.

The new play at the Adelphi was very successful. The theatre was crowded; the autumnal venture had turned out admirably; and though the audience could not be called fashionable, it was perhaps rather more animated and satisfactory in

consequence. Jim Swain's most sanguine hopes were realised. The night was fine; people did not mind waiting a few minutes; good humour and threepenny-pieces were abundant. A tolerable sprinkling of private carriages relieved the plebeian plenitude of cabs, and these vehicles were called up with an energy to which, in the season, human nature would hardly have been equal. Jim was extremely active in summoning them, and had just returned breathless to the portico of the theatre to catch another name, and rush away again to proclaim it to the listening flunkies, when he was arrested by the sight of a gentleman whose face he knew, who was standing under the garish light of the entry with a lady, whose hand rested on his arm, and whose face was turned upward towards him, so that the full glare of the light fell upon it. Her tall figure, the splendour of her dress, the careless grace of her attitude, the appearance of unconsciousness of the general observation she was attracting, even in that self-engrossed crowd—pardonably self-engrossed, considering that it was occupied with the care of getting home as soon as possible—would have

made her a sufficiently remarkable object to attract Jim's attention; but there was more than perception of all these things in the look which he fixed upon her. He stood still, a little in the shade. Routh did not see him. The lady was looking at him, and he saw nothing but her face—nothing but the brilliant dark eyes, so bright for all the world, so soft for only him; nothing but the crimson lips, which trembled; the rose-tinted cheek, which paled only at his words—only under his glance.

Her carriage was called. She walked towards it with her dress sweeping round her, and the other people fell back, and let her pass, naturally, and not by the urgency of the dingy officials who brawl and fight on such occasions. When she had taken her seat in the carriage, Routh followed her, and then Jim started forward. There was no footman, so the man with the badge and the lantern, well known and prized of unprotected females with a taste for theatre-going, asked, "Where to?" Jim, quite close, and totally unobserved, listened eagerly. The lady's voice replied, "Home."

"Home," said the man with the lantern, and

instantly turned his attention to the next departures. Jim Swain glanced at the carriage; it had no rumble, only a footboard. As it drove off slowly, for the Strand was crowded, he dashed into the jumble of cabs and omnibuses and followed it, running desperately, but dexterously too, and succeeded in keeping up with it until, at a point of comparative obscurity, he clambered up on the footboard.

The carriage rolled westward, and carried Jim Swain with it until it reached one of the small so-called squares which are situated between Brompton proper and Chelsea. Then it stopped before a house with a heavy stone portico and a heavy stone balcony. Jim slid lightly to the ground, and hid himself in the shelter of the heavy stone portico of the adjoining house. Routh got out of the carriage; and when the house-door was opened, and a flood of light issued from it, he handed out the lady. She stood breathing the sweet air a moment, and the light once more touched her face and her dress with a rich radiance.

“It’s her,” said Jim. “It’s her—*her* and *him*.”

“What a lovely night!” said Mrs. Ireton P.

Bembridge, and then the door closed on her and Routh, and Jim stood still in his hiding-place until the carriage had slowly departed to the adjacent mews. Then he emerged from the portico, went up the steps of the house the lady and her companion had entered, and looked at the number on the door, distinctly visible by the light of the gas-jet within.

“Number four,” said Jim; “now for the name of the square;” and he crossed the road, skirted the railings of the enclosed patch of brown ground and stunted shrubs, and took the opposite side of the way. The night was clear and bright, and the name of the square was distinctly legible.

“Hollington-square,” said Jim. “They called Mrs. Bembridge’s carriage. I have not a bad head for names, but I’ll get Teddy Smith to write these down. And I can’t stand it any longer; I must do something. I’ll try and get Mr. Dallas to let me speak to him when he comes from abroad, and then I’ll tell him all about it. I suppose,” said Jim very ruefully, “if he thinks right to tell, they’ll lag me; but it can’t be helped. Almost every one as I’ve knowed gets lagged some time or other.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE FALLING OF THE SWORD.

STEWART ROUTH left his house in Mayfair at an early hour on the day following that which had witnessed the eccentric proceedings and subsequent resolution of Jim Swain. Things were prospering with him; and the vague dread which had fallen on him had been dissipated. Hope and defiance divided his mind between them. His speculations were all doing well; there was money to be had—money easy to be realised, on which he could lay his hand at very short notice, and there was triumphant successful love. So much had hope to feed on—assuredly no insufficient aliment. Defiance reared itself against Fate. The time was drawing near, approaching with fearfully rapid strides, when the contingency, long contemplated, successfully eluded for a period beyond his expectation, kept off by such unlikely accidents and combinations as

might almost have justified his daring faith in his luck, but recognised of late as inevitable, must be realised when the identity of the murdered man must be known, and the perilous investigation must begin. So be it, he was ready to meet the danger if it must be met; but he hoped no such necessity would arise. His influence over the beautiful woman whom he now really loved with all the passion he had at first feigned was becoming every day stronger and more complete. He knew that the strength of his nature had subdued her; she had no pride, she had only vanity; and Stewart Routh made the mistake to which selfish and interested natures are prone. He forgot to calculate upon the influence of selfishness and calculation when their employ must necessarily be in opposition to him. His egotism injured the balance of his intellect, and now he had not the aid of Harriet's calm, cool, unerring judgment in his scheme to restore that balance. His position with regard to Harriet was the most troublesome topic of his thoughts just now. He tried to forget it often, but he did not succeed; not that any sentimental obstacle to the

most complete oblivion presented itself. Routh never bestowed a backward glance upon the life of self-sacrifice and devotion to him, of fidelity which, however depraved in its manifestations, was still fidelity, fond and true as the best man who ever lived an honest and virtuous life in the face of heaven and earth might be proud to inspire, which had been that of the woman whom he had deliberately betrayed, and was now prepared deliberately to abandon. He would have sneered at such a suggestion as a contemptible weakness. Harriet had been undeniably useful to him. He did not attempt to deny the fact to himself; but circumstances had arisen which prevented his making use of her in the future, and consequently, as this instrument was unfortunately living, intelligent, peculiarly acute, and animated by one of the strongest of human passions, had become dangerous. Harriet had been agreeable to him too—it has been said that he had loved her after his fashion; but this had been all over months ago; and the dearest of all mortal things, to a man of Stewart Routh's stamp, is a dead love; it has not even the dreary faculty of ghost-

liness — it cannot haunt. The uncomplaining, active, hard-working, inventive, untiring comrade, the passionately loving wife, the shrewd, unscrupulous, undaunted, steel-nerved colleague, was nothing more to him now than a dangerously sharp-witted, suspicious woman, who knew a great deal too much about him, and was desperately in his way. The exhilaration of his spirits and the partial intoxication of his new passion had done away with the fear of Harriet which had taken possession of him, but they had intensified his dislike, and one thought presented itself with peculiar distinctness to Stewart Routh as he went Citywards that morning. It was:

“If it was only to get out of her sight, to be rid of her for ever, what a relief it would be!”

He had been at some pains to keep up appearance with his wife since their return to London. To the step which he meditated a quarrel with her was in no way necessary; and in the event of his failing to bring his plans to maturity before the inevitable discovery, it was all important that they should be agreed on the line of action to be taken. Harriet could not, indeed, oppose him

successfully in his determination, if the occasion should arise, to throw the charge of the murder upon George Dallas; but she might render his position extremely perilous if she did not second him. What reason had he to fear? The estrangement between them had been growing wider, it was true, but it had not been exclusively of his making; she had held aloof from him as much as he from her, and he acknowledged that, if no infidelity had existed upon his part, it would still have taken place. From the moment they ceased to be comrades in expedients, and became accomplices in crime, the consequences made themselves felt. Routh did not believe in blessings or in curses, but he did not dispute the inevitable result of two persons finding out the full extent of each other's wickedness—that those two persons, if obliged to live together, will find it rather uncomfortable. The worst accomplice a man can have is his wife, he had often thought; women always have some scruple lurking somewhere about them, a hankering after the ideal, for the possibility of respecting a man in some degree. When he had been forced to see and to believe in

the intensity of his wife's silent sufferings, it had occurred to him more than once to think, "she would not be so miserable if she had done it herself; she would have been much jollier. Nothing ever will cure some women of sentiment."

Did it ever occur to him that it had not been worth his while to do what he had done? that, on the whole, it had not paid? No, never. Routh had been angry with Harriet when the matter had been brought up between them, had complained that it was always "cropping up;" but the truth was, he thought of it himself much more frequently than it was impressed on him by any allusion from without; and he never ceased to remind himself that the deed had been necessary, indispensable. It had brought him money when money must have been had, or all must have ended for him; it had brought him money when money meant a clearing and brightening of his sky, an utter change in his life, the cessation of a hazardous and ignoble warfare, the restoration to a peaceful and comparatively safe career. He was in a difficult position now, it was true—a position in which there was peril to be surmounted only

by dauntlessness, prudence, and coolness; but he was dauntless, prudent, and cool. Had all this never been, what might have been his position? When Deane and he had met, his luck had been almost at its lowest; and, in the comradeship which had ensued, there had always been burning anger and intense humiliation on Routh's part, and cold, sneering, heartless boasting on Deane's. Routh was the cleverer man of the two, and incomparably the greater villain; but Deane had elements of rascality in him which even Routh had felt himself entitled to despise. And he had hated him. Routh, in his cool manner of thinking things over, had not failed to take this feeling into due account. He would not have killed Deane only because he hated him; he was too true to his principles to incur so tremendous a risk for the simple gratification of even the worst sentiment, of even sentiment intensified into a passion, but he allowed it sufficient weight and influence effectually to bar the entrance of a regret when the larger object had also been attained. He had no pity for his victim, not even the physical sensation which is experienced by men whose

organisation and associations are not of the brutal kind, when temper, circumstances, or sudden temptation have impelled them to deeds of cruelty; he had hated Deane too much for that. He never thought of the crime he had committed without dwelling on the conduct which had made him resolve upon it. How the man had played with his necessities, had tricked him with compromising confidences, had duped him with false promises, had led him to the very brink of the abyss, and there had struggled with him—with him, a desperate man! Fool—fool! one must go over the brink, then; and who should it be but the weaker? who should hold his ground but the stronger—but he who had everything to gain? He thought over all those things again to-day, methodically, arranging the circumstances as they had occurred in his mind. He recalled the hours of suspense through which he had lived on that day when Deane had promised to bring him a sum of money, representing his own interest in the mining company, which sum was to secure to Routh the position he had striven hard to attain, and rescue him from the consequences of a fraudulent transfer of

shares which he had already effected. It had come to a question of hours, and the impatience and suspense had almost worn out Routh's strong nerves, almost deprived him of his self-command. How well he remembered it; how he lived through all that time again! It had never been so vivid in his remembrance, with all the vitality of hate and anger, often as he had thought of it, as it was to-day.

The heartless trifling, the petty insolence of the rich rascal, who little guessed the strength and resolution, the daring and desperation, of the greater, if worse, villain, came back as freshly to Stewart Routh's vindictive memory as if he had not had his ghastly revenge and his miserable triumph months ago, as if he had suffered and winced under them but yesterday. And that yesterday! What a glorious day in his life it had been! Presently he would think about that, and nothing but that; but now he must pursue his task of memory to the end. For he was not his own master in this. Once set to thinking of it, to living it all over again, he had no power to abridge the history.

He had to remember the hours during which he had waited for Deane's coming, for the payment of the promised money; he had to remember how they waned, and left him sick with disappointment, maddened with apprehension; how he had determined he would keep the second appointment with Deane: he did not fear his failing in that, because it was for his own pleasure; and then, for the first time in his life, had felt physically unable to endure suspense, to keep up appearances. He had to remember how he had shrunk from the coarse insolence with which he knew Deane would sport with his fears and his suspense in the presence of George Dallas, unconscious of their mutual position; how all-important it was that, until he had wrung from Deane the promised money, he should keep his temper. He had to remember how the idea that the man who had so far broken faith with him already, and might break faith with him altogether, and so ruin him utterly (for if he had failed then, and been detected, hope would have been at an end for him), was within a few yards of him, perhaps with the promised money in his

pocket at that moment, had occurred to him with a strange fascination. How it had intensified his hatred of Deane; how it had deepened his sense of his own degradation; how it had made him rebel against and curse his own poverty, and filled his heart with malediction on the rich man who owned that money which meant safety and success to him. He had to remember how Deane had given no answer to his note, temperately worded and reasonable (Harriet had kept to the letter of the truth in what she had said of it to George Dallas), but had left him to all the tortures of suspense. He had to remember how the desire to know whether Deane really had had all day in his possession the money he had promised him, and had kept him expecting, grew imperative, implacable, irresistible; how he had hung about the tavern, and discovered by Deane's boasting words to his companion that he had guessed aright, had followed them, determined to have an answer from Deane. He had to remember how he strove with anger, with some remnants of his former pride, which tortured him with savage longings for revenge, while he waited about in

the purlieus of the billiard-rooms whither Deane and Dallas and gone. He remembered how lonely and blank, how quiet and dreary, the street had become by the time the two came out of the house together and parted, in his hearing, with some careless words. He had to remember how he confronted Deane, and was greeted with a taunt; how he had borne it; how the man had played with his suspense, and ostentatiously displayed the money which the other had vainly watched and waited for all day; and then, suddenly assuming an air of friendliness and confidence, had led him away Citywards, without betraying his place of residence, questioning him about George Dallas. He had to remember how this had embittered and intensified his anger, and how a sudden fear had sprung up in his mind that Deane had confided to Dallas the promises he had made to him, and the extent to which their "business" relations had gone. A dexterous question or two had relieved this apprehension, and then he had once more turned the conversation on the subject in which he was so vitally interested. He had to remember—and

how vividly he did remember, with what an awakening of the savage fury it had called into life, how Deane had met this fresh attempt—with what a cool and tranquil assertion that he had changed his mind, had no further intention of doing any business in Routh's line—was going out of town, indeed, on the morrow, to visit some relations in the country, too long neglected, and had no notion when they should meet again.

And then—then Stewart Routh had to remember how he had killed the man who had taunted, deceived, treated him cruelly; how he had killed him, and robbed him, and gone home and told his wife—his comrade, his colleague, his dauntless, unscrupulous Harriet. He had to remember more than all this, and he hated to remember it. But the obligation was upon him; he could not forget how she had acted, after the first agony had passed over, the first penalty inflicted by her physical weakness, which she had spurned and striven against. So surely as his memory was forced to reproduce all that had gone before, it was condemned to revive all that had come after. But he did not soften towards her that day, no,

not in the least, though never had his recollection been so detailed, so minute, so calm. No, he hated her. She wearied him; she had ceased to be of any service to him; she was a constant torment to him. So he came back to the idea with which his reflections had commenced, and, as he entered on the perusal of the mass of papers which awaited his attention in his "chambers" in Tokenhouse-yard—for he shared the business-abode of the invisible Flinders now—he repeated:

“What a relief it would be to get away from her for ever!”

Only a few days now, and the end must come. He was a brave man in his evil way, and he made his calculations coolly, and scanned his criminal combinations without any foolish excess of confidence, but with well-grounded expectation. For a little longer it would not be difficult to keep on fair terms with Harriet, especially as she had renewed her solitary mode of life, and he had taken the precaution of pretending to a revived devotion to play, since the auspicious occasion on which he had won so largely at Homburg. Thus his absence from home was accounted for; and as

she had not the slightest suspicion that Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge was in London, had never displayed the least jealousy, except on the one occasion when he had shown her the locket, and had unhesitatingly accepted his explanation of their sudden return to England, he had no reason to trouble himself about her. To sedulously avoid exciting her suspicion and jealousy now, and, when the proper time should arrive, to confirm the one and arouse the other so effectually by desertion, infidelity, and insult, as to drive her at once to free herself from him by the aid of the law—this was his scheme. It looked well; he knew Harriet, he thought, thoroughly, and he might safely calculate upon the course she would adopt. It was strange, if human inconsistency can ever be strange, that Stewart Routh, a man of eminently vindictive disposition, entirely forgot to take into account that the woman thus desperately injured might also seek her revenge, which would consist in declining to take her own freedom at the price of giving him his.

Perhaps if the depths of that dark heart had been sounded, the depths beyond its own con-

sciousness—the unvisited, unquestioned, profound—it would have been discovered that this man was so entirely accustomed to the devotion of the woman who loved him with a desperate though intelligent love, that even in her utmost despair and extreme outrage of wrong he felt assured she would do that which it was his will she should do.

During all this mental review he had hardly bestowed a thought on George Dallas. He would be safe enough in the end, if the worst came to the worst. It had suited him to magnify the strength of the chain of coincidences, which looked like evidence, in discussing them with George, and he had magnified it; it suited him to diminish that strength in discussing them with himself, and he diminished it. A good deal of suffering and disgrace to all the “Felton-Dallas-Carruthers connection,” as he insolently phrased it in his thoughts, must come to pass, of course, but no real danger. And if it were not so? Well, in that case, he really could not afford to care. When he had wanted money, Deane (he still thought of him by that name) had had to

give way to that imperative need. Now he wanted safety, and Dallas must pay its price. There was something of the sublime of evil in this man's sovereign egotism. As he turned his mind away from the path it had been forced to tread to the end, he thought, "there is a touch of the whimsical in everything; in this it is the demi-semi-relationship between Harriet and these people. I suppose the sensitive lady of Poynings never heard of her step-father Creswick's niece."

A letter for Mr. Routh, a delicate, refined-looking letter, sealed with the daintiest of monograms, the thick board-like envelope containing a sheet of paper to match, on which only a few lines are scrawled. But as Stewart Routh reads them, his sinister dark eyes gleam with pleasure and triumph, and his handsome evil face is deeply flushed.

"Bearer waits." Mr. Routh writes an answer to the letter, short but ardent, if any one had now been there to judge by the expression of his face while he was writing it. He calls his clerk, who takes the letter to "bearer;" but that individual has been profiting by the interval to

try the beer in a closely adjacent beer-shop, and the letter is laid upon a table in the passage leading to Stewart Routh's rooms, to await his return from the interesting investigation.

Another letter for Mr. Routh, and this time also "bearer waits." Waits, too, in the passage, and sees the letter lying on the table, and has plenty of time to read the address before the experimenting commissioner returns, has it handed to him, and trudges off with it.

Presently the door at the end of the passage opens, and Routh comes out. "Who brought me a letter just now?" he says to the clerk, and then stops short, and turns to "bearer."

"O, it's you, Jim, is it? Take this to Mrs. Routh."

Then Stewart Routh went back to his room, and read again the note to which he had just replied. It was from Harriet, and contained only these words:

"Come home at the first possible moment. A letter from G. D., detained by accident for two days, has just come, and is of the utmost importance. *Let nothing detain you.*"

The joy and triumph in his face had given way to fury; he muttered angry oaths as he tore the note up viciously.

“All the more reason if the worst has come—or is nearer than we thought—that I should strike the decisive blow to-day. She has all but made up her mind—she must make it quite up to-day. This is Tuesday; the *Asia* sails on Saturday. A letter from Dallas only cannot bring about the final crash: nothing can really happen till he is here. If I have only ordinary luck, we shall be out of harm’s way by then.”

A little later Stewart Routh made certain changes in his dress, very carefully, and departed from Tokenhouse-yard in a hansom, looking as unlike a man with any cares, business, or other kind upon his mind as any gentleman in all London. “Queen’s-gate, Kensington,” he said to the driver; and the last words of the letter, daintily sealed, and written on board-like paper, which was in his breast-pocket at that moment, were:

*“I will wait for you in the carriage at Queen’s-gate.”*

“I’m glad I see’d that ’ere letter,” said Jim Swain to himself, as, deeply preoccupied by the circumstances of the preceding day, he faced towards Routh’s house, “because when I put Mr. Dallas on this here lay, I needn’t let out as I spied ’em home. I can ’count for knowin’ on the place permiskus.” And then, from an intricate recess of his dirty pocket, much complicated with crumbs and fragments of tobacco, Jim pulled out a crumpled scrap of paper. “Teddy wrote it down quite right,” he said, and he smoothed out the paper, and transferred it, for safer keeping, to his cap, in which he had deposited the missive with which he was charged.

When Jim Swain arrived at his destination, and the door was opened to him, Harriet was in the hall. She seemed surprised that he had brought her a written answer. She had expected merely a verbal reply, telling her how soon Routh would be home. Jim pulled his cap off hastily, taken by surprise at seeing her, and while he handed her the note, looked at her with a full renewal of all the compassion for her which had formerly filled his untaught but not untender

heart. He guessed rightly that he had brought her something that would pain her. She looked afraid of the note during the moment she held it unopened in her hand; but she did not think only of herself, she did not forget to be kind to him.

“Go down to the kitchen, and cook will give you some dinner, Jim,” she said, as she went into the dining-room and shut the door; and the boy obeyed her with an additional sense of hatred and suspicion against Routh at his heart.

“I’m beginning to make it all out now,” he thought, as he disposed of his dinner in most unusual silence. “The other one put Routh up to it all, out of spite of some kind. It was a plant of *hers*, it was; and this here good ’un—for she *is* good—is a-sufferin’ for it all, while he’s a carryin’ on.” Shortly after, Jim Swain took a rueful leave of the friendly cook, and departed by the area-gate. Having reached Piccadilly, he stood still for a moment, pondering, and then took a resolution, in pursuance of which he approached the house at which he had made a similar in-

quiry the day before, and again asked if there was any news of Mr. Felton. "Yes," the servant replied; "a telegram had been received from Paris. The rooms were to be ready on the following day. Mr. Felton and Mr. Dallas were coming by the tidal train."

"I've a mind to go back and tell her," said Jim to himself. "She must want to know for some particular reason, or she wouldn't have sent me to ask yesterday, and she wouldn't have let me catch her out in tellin' a crammer if there warn't somethin' in it. But no," said Jim sagely, "I won't. I'll wait for Mr. Dallas; there ain't long to wait now."

Jim Swain's resolution had an important consequence, which came about in a very ordinary and trifling way. If the boy had gone back to Routh's house, and had been admitted into the hall, he would have seen a piece of paper lying on the door-mat, on which his quick eyes would instantly have recognised the caligraphic feat of his accomplished friend, Teddy Smith; and he would have regained possession of it. But Jim did not return, and the paper lay there undis-

turbed for some hours—lay there, indeed, until it was seen by the irreproachable Harris when he went to light the gas, picked up, perused by him, and taken to his mistress, who was sitting in the drawing-room quite unoccupied. She looked up as the servant entered; and when the room was lighted, he saw that she was deadly pale, but took no notice of the paper which he placed on the table beside her. Some time after he had left the room her glance fell upon it, and she stretched out her hand wearily, and took it up, with a vague notion that it was a tax-gather's notice. But Harriet Routh, whose nerves had once been proof against horror, dread, suffering, danger, or surprise, started as if she had been shot when she saw, written upon the paper: "Mrs. Bembridge, 4 Hollington-square, Brompton."

## CHAPTER IX.

“CRUEL AS THE GRAVE.”

“I DO not know what he is doing,” Harriet had repeated to herself in sore distress; “I do not know what he is doing. I am in the dark, and the tide is rising.”

The jealous agony she had suffered at Hom-burg was harder to bear than the uncertainty which had been her lot since her return. The intense passion of jealousy sprung up within her was a revelation to this woman of the violence of her own nature, over which a stern restraint had been kept so long that quiet and calm had grown habitual to her while nothing troubled or disputed her love; but they deserted her at the first rude touch laid upon the sole treasure, the joy, the punishment, the occupation, mainspring, and meaning of her life. Under all the quiet of her manner, under all the smoothness of her

speech, Harriet Routh knew well there was a savage element in the desperation of her love for Routh, since he had committed the crime which sets a man apart from his fellows, marked with the brand of blood. She had loved him in spite of the principles of her education, in defiance of the stings of her conscience, dead now, but which had died hard; but now she loved him in spite of the promptings of her instincts, in spite of the revulsion of her womanly feelings, in defiance of the revolt of her senses and her nerves. The more utterly lost he was, the more she clung to him, not indeed in appearance, for her manner had lost its old softness, and her voice the tone which had been a caress; but in her torn and tortured heart. With desperate and mad obstinacy she loved him, defied fate, and hated the world which had been hard to him, for his sake.

With the first pang of jealousy awoke the fierceness of this love, awoke the proud and defiant assertion of her love and her ownership in her breast. Never would Harriet have pleaded her true, if perverted, love, her unwavering, if

wicked, fidelity, to the man who was drifting away from her; the woman's lost soul was too generous for that; but he was hers, her own;—purchased;—God, in whom she did not believe, and the devil, whom she did not fear, alone knew at what a price;—and he should not be taken from her by another, by one who had done nothing for him, suffered nothing for him, lost nothing for him. Her combativeness and her craft had been called into instant action by the first discovery of the unexpected peril in which her sole treasure was placed. She understood her position perfectly. No woman could have known more distinctly than Harriet how complete is the helplessness of a wife when her husband's love is straying from her, beckoned towards another—helplessness which every point of contrast between her and her rival increases. She was quite incapable of the futile strife, the vulgar railing, which are the ordinary weapons of ordinary women in the unequal combat; she would have disdained their employment; but fate had furnished her with weapons of other form and far different effectiveness, and these she would use. Routh had strong

common-sense, intense selfishness, and shrewd judgment. An appeal to these, she thought, could not fail. Nevertheless, they *had* failed, and Harriet was bewildered by their failure. When she made her first appeal to Routh, she was wholly unprepared for his refusal. The danger was so tremendous, the unforeseen discovery of the murdered man's identity had introduced into their position a complication so momentous, so insurmountable, that she had never dreamed for a moment of Routh's being insensible to its weight and emergency. But he rejected her appeal—rudely, brutally, almost, and her astonishment was hardly inferior to her anguish. He must indeed be infatuated by this strange and beautiful woman (Harriet fully admitted the American's beauty—there was an element of candour and judgment in her which made the littleness of depreciating a rival impossible) when he could overlook or under-estimate the importance, the danger, of this newly arisen complication.

This was a new phase in her husband's character; this was an aspect under which she had never seen him, and she was bewildered by it, for

a little. It had occurred to her once, on the day when she last saw George Dallas—parting with him at the gate of his mother's house—to think whether, had she had any other resource but her husband, had the whole world outside of him not been a dead blank to her, she could have let him go. She had heard of such things; she knew they happened; she knew that many women in “the world” took their husbands' infidelity quietly, if not kindly, and let them go, turning them to the resources of wealth and pleasure. She had no such resources, nor could these have appeased her for a moment if she had had. She cared nothing for liberty, she who had worn the chain of the most abject slavery, that of engrossing passionate love for an unworthy object, willingly, had hugged it to her bosom, had allowed it without an effort to alleviate the pain, to eat into her flesh, and fill it with corruption. But, more than this, she could not let him go, for his own sake; she was true to the law of her life, that “honour rooted in dishonour” knew no tarnishing from her; she must save him, for his own sake—from himself, she must save him, though not to bring him back to

her—must save him, in spite of himself, though she longed, in the cruel pangs of her woman’s anguish, to have done with it—to have found that nothingness in which she had come to believe as the “end all,” and had learned to look to as her sovereign good.

She had reached such a conclusion, in her meditations, on the night of the great storm at Homburg; she had determined on a course to be adopted for Routh’s sake. She would discard fear, and show him that he must relinquish the desperate game he was playing. She would prove to him that fate had been too strong for him; that in Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge the fatality which was destined to destroy him existed; that her acquaintance with Arthur Felton, and her knowledge of Arthur Felton’s affairs, into whose extent Routh had no possible pretext for inquiry, must necessarily establish the missing link. She would hide from him her own sufferings; she would keep down her jealousy and her love; she would appeal to him for himself; she would plead with him only his own danger, only the tremendous risk he was involving himself in. Then she *must*

succeed; then the double agony of jealousy of him and fear for him in which she now lived must subside, the burning torment must be stilled. The time might perhaps come in which she should so far conquer self as to be thankful that such suffering had brought about his safety, for there could be no real security for them in London, the terrible fact of Deane's identity with Arthur Felton once known. After that discovery, no arguments could avail with George; the strength of all those which she had used would become potent against her, their weight would be against her—that weight which she had so skilfully adjusted in the balance. After all, she thought that night, as she sat in the darkness and idly watched the lightning, hearing the raging wind unmoved, what would a little more misery matter to her? Little, indeed, if it brought him safety; and it should, it must!

From this condition of mind she had been roused by Routh's startling announcement of their departure on the morrow. The effect produced upon Harriet was strange. She did not believe that Routh had been only to the gaming-rooms that night: she felt an immutable conviction that

he had seen Mrs. Bembridge, and she instantly concluded that he had received a rebuff from the beautiful American. Inexpressibly relieved, — though not blind enough to be in the least insensible to the infamy of her husband’s faithlessness, and quite aware that she had more, rather than less, to complain of than she had previously believed ;—for she rightly judged, this woman is too finished a coquette to throw up her game a moment before her own interest and safety absolutely obliged her to do so—she acquiesced immediately.

Had Stewart Routh had the least suspicion of the extent of his wife’s knowledge of his life at Homburg, he could not have been lulled into the false security in which he indulged on his return to London. He perceived, indeed, that Harriet closely noted the state of his spirits, and silently observed his actions. But he was used to that. Harriet had no one to think of but him, had nothing to care about but him ; and she had always watched him. Pleasantly, gaily, before ;—coldly, grimly, now ; but it was all the same thing. He was quite right in believing she had not the least

suspicion that Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge was in London, but that was the sole point on which he was correct. Had he known how much his wife knew, he would have affected a dejection of spirits he was far from feeling, and would have disarmed her by greater attention to her during the few hours of each day which he passed at home.

Harriet was at a loss to account for his cheerfulness ; but strong of mind and heart as she was, she was not altogether free from the weakness of catching at that interpretation of a mystery in which there was some relief for her own pain. So she concluded that he had been only passingly, and not deeply, hurt by the coquetry of the woman who had attracted him, and that he had recovered from the superficial wound, as soon as he became again immersed in the schemes which had awaited him in London.

He had told her little concerning these schemes, but she considered this reticence due to her own withdrawal from her former active participation in the business of his life, and it was an additional inducement to her to hope that Routh was taking the resolution which she desired. “When we get

back to London, I will think about it,” he had said, and she clung to the hope, to the half promise in the words. He was surely settling affairs so as to enable him to avoid the bursting of the storm. The tacit estrangement between them would account for his doing this silently ; his vile temper, which Harriet thoroughly understood, and never failed to recognise in action, would account for his denying her the relief of knowing his intentions. Many small things in his daily life, which did not escape the quickened perception of his wife, betokened a state of preparation for some decided course of action. The time of explanation must necessarily come ; meanwhile, she watched, and waited, and suffered.

How she suffered in every hour of her life ! Yet there was a kind of dulness over Harriet too. She recurred little to the past in point of feeling ; she thought over it, indeed, in aid of the action of her reason and her will, but she did not recall it with the keenness either of acute grief for its vanished happiness, such as it had been, or of remorse and terror for its deep and desperate guilt. The burden of the day was enough now

for this woman, whose strength had lasted so long, endured so much, and given way so suddenly.

But time was marching on. The inevitable end drawing near, and Harriet had been utterly unprepared for the second shock, the second unexpected event which had befallen. She had opened George Dallas's letter with the Paris post-mark almost without an apprehension. The time for the thing she feared had not yet come; and here was a thing she had never feared, a possibility which had never presented itself to her imagination, brought at once fully before her. She had done this thing. One moment's want of caution, in the midst of a scene in which her nerves had been strung to their highest tension, and this had been the result. Had no other clue existed, these few lines of writing would furnish one leading unerringly to discovery. Supposing no other clue to exist, and Routh to pretend to inability to identify the writing, there were several common acquaintances of Dallas and Deane who *could* identify it, and render a refusal the most dangerous step which Routh could take.

She sat for several minutes perfectly still, her

face colourless as marble, and her blue eyes, fixed with a painful expression of terror, under the shock of this new discovery. She had had no worse apprehension than that the letter would announce the day of George's intended return, and for that she was prepared; but this! It was too much for her, and the first words she uttered showed that her mind had lost its strict faculty of reasoning; they broke from her with a groan:

“I—I it is who have destroyed him!”

But, even now, weakness and exaggeration had no long duration in Harriet Routh's mind. By degrees she saw this in its true light, an alarming, a terrible coincidence indeed, an addition to the danger of their position, but not necessarily a fatal catastrophe. Then she saw new light, she caught at a new idea, a fresh, bright hope. This would avail with Routh; this would drive away his irresolution; this would really inspire him with the true conviction of their danger; this, which would throw the whole burden of identification upon him; this, which would establish a strong and intimate link between him and the dead man; for the “articles to be purchased,”

named in the memorandum of which George had sent her a copy, were simply shares in companies with everyone of which Stewart Routh was connected. Only George's ignorance of such matters had prevented his recognising the meaning of the memorandum.

And now Harriet rose; and as she paced the room, the colour came back to her cheek, the light came back to her eyes. A new life and fresh energy seemed to spring up within her, and she grasped George's letter in her hand, and struck it against her bosom with an action of the hand and a responsive movement of the breast which was almost triumphant. This thing which she had done, which had looked like ruin, would be her way of escape.

Routh's refusal to return home immediately annoyed, puzzled, and disheartened her. Why was he so hard to move, so difficult to convince, so insensible to danger? His plea was business; if this business was what she hoped and believed it to be, that of preparation, he should have come home to learn the new and urgent need for its expedition. Why was he so hard to her? Why

had he no thought for her wishes, no compassion on her suspense? Harriet could not but ask herself that, though she strove against the deadly suffering the answer brought her.

Thus the time wore on drearily, until Harriet carelessly took from the table the slip of paper which contained a whole revelation for her.

Of the hours which succeeded she could not have given an account herself. How the fury of jealousy, of love betrayed, of faith violated, was reawakened within her, and inflamed to the wildest and most desperate pitch; how she writhed under the shame and the scorn which her husband's baseness forced her to feel. She had had profoundest pity, readiest help for the criminal; but for this pitiful, cowardly, cruel liar nothing but contempt—nothing! Ah, yes, something more, and that made it all the harder—contempt and love.

The woman was here, then—here, in London, on the spot to ruin him, lured hither by him. His false heart planned; his guilty hands dug the pit into which he was to fall; and now his feet were close upon the brink. This rendered

him deaf and blind; for this he had basely deceived her, his best, his only friend; for this he had come to regard and treat her as his enemy; and now Harriet had to make a desperate effort indeed to rally all her strength and courage. She had to put the suffering aside, to let all her hopes go, to face a new and almost desperate condition of affairs, and to think how he was to be saved. It must be in spite of himself. This time, it must be in defiance of himself.

She had passed through a long period of suffering—if time is to be measured by pain—before Routh came home. She had not nearly thought it out; she had only reached a resolution to be patient and peaceful, and to conceal her knowledge of his treachery if any effort could give her the strength to do so, when she heard his key in the lock, and the next moment his hand on the door-handle.

There was confusion in the expression of Routh's shifty black eyes, some embarrassment in the tone of his voice. They were slight; but she saw and understood them. Her heart gave one angry bound under the paper which lay

securely in her bosom, but her steady face took no change from the pulsation.

“Sorry I couldn’t get back. I got away as soon as I could,” said Routh, as he threw aside his coat and put his hat down. Harriet pushed a chair towards him, and he sat down before she answered :

“I am sorry, too, Stewart. I can hardly think any business can have equalled in importance such an occurrence as this.”

She put George Dallas’s letter into his hand, and eagerly watched him, while with a face convulsed by anger, hatred, and all unholy passions, he read it.

If she could have seen his heart! If she could have read the devilish project that filled it! If she could have seen that in the discovery of the new and urgent danger he had seen, not blind to that danger indeed, but catching at the chance included in it, a means of realising his atrocious plot against her! If she could have distinguished, amid the surging, passionate thoughts and impulses which raged within him, this one, which each second made more clear :

“This is my opportunity. All is settled, all is right; *she* and I are safe. I have triumphed, and this cursed letter gives me a better chance than any I could have formed or made. This infernal idiot is always my curse and my dupe; however, he has done me a good turn this time.”

If Harriet, watching the changes in her husband's countenance, could have read these thoughts, she might have interpreted aright the ferocity which blazed in his wicked eyes, while a cynical sneer curled his lip, as he flung the letter violently on the floor, starting up from his chair.

Harriet had seen Routh in a passion more than once, though only once had that passion been directed against herself, and she was not a woman, even when its victim, to be frightened by a man's temper. But she was frightened now, really and truly frightened, not, however, by the violence of his rage, but because she did not believe in it. She did not understand his game; she saw he was playing one; why he feigned this fury she could not comprehend, but she knew it was feigned, and she was frightened. Against complicated deception of this kind she was power-

less. She could not oppose successful art to the ingenious skill with which he was courting his own ruin, to save him. She could not disentangle this thought from the confusion in her brain; she felt only its first thrill of conviction, she only shrank from it with swift, sharp, physical pain, when Routh turned upon her with a torrent of angry and fierce reproaches.

“This is your doing,” he said, the violence of his simulated anger hurrying his words, and rendering them almost unintelligible. “I owe it to you that this cursed fool has me in his power, if the idiot only finds it out, and knows how to use it, more securely than I ever had him in mine. This is your skill and your wisdom; your caution and your management, is it? Like a fool, I trusted a woman—you were always so sure of yourself, you know, and here’s the result. You keep this pretty piece of conviction in your desk, and produce it just in the nick of time. I don’t wonder you wanted me home; I don’t wonder you were in such a hurry to give me such a proof of your boasted cleverness.”

Her clear blue eyes were upon him; his rest-

less black eyes shifted under her gaze, but could not escape it. She did not release him for an instant from that piercing look, which became, with each word he spoke, more and more alight with scorn and power. The steady look maddened him, the feigned passion changed to real rage, the man's evil face paled.

She slightly raised her hand, and pointed to the chair he had left; he kicked it savagely away. She spoke, her hand still extended. "Stewart, I do not understand you, but I am not taken in by you. What are you aiming at? Why are you pretending to this violent and unreasonable anger?"

"Pretending!" he exclaimed, with an oath; "it is no pretence, as you shall find. Pretending! Woman, you have ruined me, and I say—"

"And *I* say," she interposed, as she slowly rose, and stood upright before him, her head raised, her steady eyes still mercilessly set on his, "this is a vain and ridiculous pretence. You cannot long conceal its motive from me: whatever game you are playing, I will find it out."

"Will you, by —?" he said fiercely.

“I will, for your own sake,” she answered calmly. And, standing before him, she touched him lightly on the breast with her small white hand. “Stop! don’t speak. I say, for your own sake. You and I, Stewart, who were once one, are two now; but that makes no change in me. I don’t reproach you.”

“O, don’t you?” he said. “I know better. There’s been nothing but whining and reproaches lately.”

“Now you are acting again, and again I tell you I will find out why. The day of reproach can never—shall never—come; the day of ruin is near, awfully near—”

“You’ve taken care of that.”

“Again! You ought to know me better, Stewart; you can’t lie to me undetected. In time I shall know the truth, now I discern the lie. But all this is vain. Read once more.” She took up the letter, smoothed it out, and held it towards him. He struck it out of her hand, and cursed her.

She looked at him in blank amazement for a moment, and then said:

“You are not drunk again, Stewart? You are not mad? If you are not, listen to me, for your fate is rushing upon you. The time may be counted by hours. Never mind my share in this new event, never mind what you really think, or what you pretend to think about it. It makes my appeal to you strong, irresistible. This is no fit of woman’s terror; this is no whim, no wish to induce you to desert your harvest-field, to turn your back upon the promise of the only kind of life you care to live. Here is a link in the evidence against you, if suspicion lights upon you (and it must), which is of incontestable strength. Here, in Arthur Felton’s writing, is the memoranda of the shares which you bought and paid for with Arthur Felton’s money. Stewart, Stewart, are you blind and mad, indeed, that you stay here, that you let the precious time escape you, that you dally with your fate? Let us begone, I say; let us escape while we may. George Dallas is not our only foe, not our only danger—formidable, indeed; but remember, Stewart, Mr. Felton comes to seek for his son; remember that we have to dread the man’s father!”

The pleading in her voice was agonising in its intensity, the lustrous excitement in her blue eyes was painful, the pallor of her face was frightful. She had clasped her hands round his arm, and the fingers held him like steel fetters. He tried to shake off her hold, but she did not seem aware of the movement.

“I tell you,” she continued, “no dream was ever wilder than your hope of escape, if those two men come to London and find you here; no such possibility exists. Let us go; let us get out of the reach of their power.”

“By —, I’ll put myself out of Dallas’s reach by a very simple method, if you don’t hold your cursed tongue,” said Routh, with such ferocity that Harriet let go her hold of him, and shrank as if he had struck her. “If you don’t want me to tell Mr. Felton what has become of his son, and put him on to George’s trail myself, you’ll drop this kind of thing at once. In fact,” he said, with a savage sneer, “I hardly think a better way out of our infernal blunder could be found.”

“Stewart, Stewart!” She said no more.

“Now listen to me, Harriet,” he went on, in furious anger, but in a suppressed tone. “If you are anything like the wise woman you used to be, you won’t provoke a desperate man. Let me alone, I tell you—let me get out of this as I best can. The worst part of it is what you have brought upon me. I don’t want George Dallas to come to any serious grief, if I can help it; but if he threatens danger to me, he must clear the way, that’s all. I dare say you are very sorry, and all that. You rather took to Master George lately, believed in his prudence, and his mother, and all that kind of thing; but I can’t help that. I never had a turn for sentiment myself; but this you may be sure of—only gross blundering can bring anything of the kind about—if any one is to swing for Deane, it shall be Dallas, and not I.”

A strong shudder shook Harriet’s frame as she heard her husband’s words. But she repressed it, and spoke :

“You refuse to listen to me, then, Stewart. You will not keep your promise—your promise which, however vague, I have built upon and lived upon since we left Homburg? You will not ‘think

of' what I said to you there? Not though it is a thousand times more important now? You will not leave this life, and come away to peace and safety?"

“No, no; a thousand times no!” said Routh, in the wildest fury. “I will not—I will not! A life of peace and safety; yes, and a life of poverty, and *you*——” he added, in a tone of bitterest scorn and hatred.

A wonderful look came into the woman's face as she heard his cruel and dastardly words. As the pink had faded into the white upon her cheeks, so now the white deadened into gray—into an ashen ghostly gray, and her dry lips parted slowly, emitting a heavy sigh.

He made a step or two towards the door, she retreating before him. And when he had almost reached it, she fell suddenly upon her knees, and flung her arms round him with desperate energy.

“Stewart,” she said, in a whisper indeed, yet in a voice to be heard amid a whirlwind, “my husband, my love, my life, my darling, don't mind me! Leave me here; it will be safer, better, less suspicious. Go away, and leave me.

I don't care, indeed. I don't want to go with you. Go alone, and make sure of your safety! Stewart, say you'll go—say you'll go!"

While she was speaking, he was striving to loosen her hold upon him, but in vain. A short brief warfare was waged in that moment in his soul. If he softened to her now, if he yielded to her now, all was undone. And yet what love was this—what strange, and wondrous, and potent kind of love was this? Not the kind of love which had looked at him, an hour or two ago, out of the rich black eyes of the American widow, that had trembled in the tones of her voice. But a vision of the beauty he coveted, of the wealth he needed, of the freedom he panted for, rose before Routh's bewildered brain, and the strife ended. Evil had its own way unchecked henceforth to the end.

He raised his right arm and struck her heavily upon the face; the clasp of her hands gave way, and she sank upon the floor. Then he stepped over her, as she lay prostrate in the doorway, and left the room. When she raised herself, she pushed back her hair, and looked round with a

dreary amazement upon her troubled face, and she heard the key turned in his dressing-room door.

The day had dawned when Harriet Routh went gently up-stairs to her bedroom. She was perfectly calm. She opened the window-shutters and let the light in before she lay down on her bed. Also, she unlocked a box, which she took from her wardrobe, and looked carefully into it, then put it away satisfied. As she closed her eyes, she said, half aloud, “I can do no more; but she can save him, and she shall.”

At one o'clock on the following day, Harriet Routh, attired, as usual, in simple but ladylike dress, and presenting an appearance on which the most impertinent of pages would not have dared to cast an imputation, presented herself at No. 4 Hollington-square, Brompton. Mrs. Bembridge lived there, but Mrs. Bembridge was not at home, and would not be at home until late in the evening. Would the lady leave her name? No; but she desired Mrs. Bembridge might be informed that a lady had called, and would call again at the same hour on the morrow, who had found an

article of dress lost at Homburg by Mrs. Bembridge, and which she would restore to Mrs. Bembridge in person, but not otherwise.

As Harriet was returning home, she walked down Piccadilly, and saw Mr. Felton and George Dallas alighting from a cab at the door of the house in which their lodgings had been engaged.

“Very fair, too,” said Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge, when she received Harriet’s message from her maid, “and very natural she should expect a reward. Ladies often take advantage of that kind of thing to give money to the poor. I shan’t grudge her anything she may ask in reason, I shall be so glad to get back my golden egg.”

## CHAPTER X.

### “ INFORMATION RECEIVED.”

WHEN George Dallas knew that his meeting with Clare Carruthers was imminent, he told his uncle one of the two circumstances of his life which he had hitherto concealed from him. As George expected, Mr. Felton received the communication with some seriousness. “A little while ago, George,” he said, “this might have upset the new and good understanding happily established between Mr. Carruthers and yourself, but I am in hopes it will not do so now. I think the old gentleman’s nature is fine and forgiving, when one gets beneath the crust, and I am not afraid now. The chance of seeing the young lady, not in his presence, for the first time—that would have been awkward and dangerous indeed—is most fortunate. You must make your peace with her in the first instance.”

Enough of the old habit of trick and expedient still adhered to George, in his improved moral condition, to induce him to entertain a passing thought that perhaps the necessity for Mr. Carruthers knowing he had had any previous acquaintance with Clare might never arise; if she did not see that he must be told, George need not feel himself bound to tell him. But he rejected the impulse after a very little while, and was ashamed of it. When, therefore, Mr. Felton had left George alone at Sir Thomas Boldero's house, he had done so with intention, and without any purpose of returning.

“Meet me at my rooms afterwards,” he had said to George. “And tell Miss Carruthers I will take leave to call on her at Mrs. Stanhope's this afternoon.” George agreed, promising that he must look in at the *Mercury* office first, but would then be at his uncle's service. Left alone, he had applied himself, in a condition of extreme mental discomposure, to thinking of what he should say to Clare, and how he should say it. He had almost arranged a satisfactory programme before she came; after—well, after, he did not speak, or

look in the least like what he had intended, and if any one had asked him for an account of their interview (which no one did, it was destined to be utterly forgotten and overwhelmed in the tide of events), he would have been quite incapable of satisfying the demand.

The interview lasted long, and when, at its close, George Dallas put Clare Carruthers into her cousin's carriage, her face was closely veiled, and the little hand which lingered in his had not yet done trembling. As he stood on the doorstep and watched the carriage out of sight, the young man's face was pale and agitated, but full of deep and sacred happiness too. An expression of resolve and hope, of courage and power, was upon his features, such as they had never before worn. Had he recalled the resolution he had taken for the time when Clare Carruthers should know Paul Ward as George Dallas, and had he renewed it, with fresh heart and energy, not unaided now by circumstances, not frowned upon by fate, no longer friendless? However that may have been, he carried a humbled and grateful heart with him, and felt himself a widely different

man as he entered the dingy precincts of the *Mercury* office, from what he had been the last time he had crossed that threshold.

Mr. Cunningham was "in," and not only could see George, but was particularly anxious to see him.

"I was just writing to you, old fellow," he said, leaving off shaking hands with George, and beginning to tear up a brief and scrawly manuscript on flimsy which lay before him. "You have come in time to save me trouble and fourpence sterling."

"Anything about the business I wrote to you about?" asked George.

"Just that, sir. Of course I attended to it at once, and put Tatlow on to it on your account. They're said to be cautious chaps, the detectives, and of course it wouldn't pay for them to be said to be anything else; but I'm hanged if I ever believed it before. You may talk of depth, but Tatlow's unfathomable. Has the job from you, sir, per medium of your humble servant, and flatly declines to report progress to me; goes in for doing business only with the prin-

cipal, and when he comes to me not a word can I get out of him, except that he must know the address of a certain individual named Paul Ward.”

“ Paul Ward ? ” exclaimed George.

“ Yes, Paul Ward ! Great fun, isn't it, George ? And I really could not resist the joke of quizzing the detective a little bit. I was immensely tickled at the idea of your employing the man, and his looking after you. So I told him I knew Mr. Dallas was acquainted with a gentleman of that name, and could give him all the information he required.”

George could not laugh, but he tried to smile. Nothing could lend the subject of his uncle's suspense and anxiety even a collaterally amusing effect for him, and this statement puzzled him.

“ What on earth can I have to do with the matter ? ” he said. “ The man must be travelling very far indeed out of the right tracks. No one in the world, as it is pretty plain, can be more ignorant of Felton's affairs than I am. He must be on a totally wrong scent ; and if he has blundered in this way, it is only waste of time and money to employ him.”

“Well,” said Cunningham, a little disappointed that George did not enjoy the keenness of the capital joke as much as he did, “you must settle all that with him yourself, and find out from him, if you can—and, by Jove, I doubt it—how Paul Ward has got mixed up in your cousin’s affairs (if he has got mixed up in them—and, mind, I don’t feel sure even of that—he certainly did not say so) without your being a party to the transaction. I just gave Tatlow your address in Piccadilly, and told him you’d be there in a day or two.”

“What did he say?” asked George, whose sense of mystification was increasing.

“Said he should call every day until you arrived,—no doubt he has been there to-day, or you’ll find him there when you get home,—and disappeared, having got all the information I chose to give him, but not what he wanted; which is, I take it, the correct thing to do to a detective who observes the laws of discretion too absolutely.”

Cunningham was laughing his jolly laugh, and George was wondering what Tatlow meant, when the entrance of a third individual on office business interrupted the friends’ talk. George took leave,

and went down-stairs. Arrived at the door, he stopped, ran up the first flight of dirty stairs again, and turned into a small room, dimly lighted by a dirty skylight, to the right of the first landing. In this sanctuary, strong smelling of dust, size, and printer's ink, lay files, bound and unbound, of the *Mercury*. A heavy volume was open on the clumsy thick-legged table which filled up the centre of the room. It contained the files of the newspaper for the first half of the current year.

"Let me see," said George, "she was not quite sure about the 22d ; but it must have been about that date."

Then he turned the leaves, and scanned the columns of advertisements, until he found in one the warning which Clare Carruthers had sent to Paul Ward. His eyes filled with tears as he read it. He called up one of the office people, and had a copy of the paper of that date looked for, out of which he carefully cut the advertisement, and consigned it to the keeping of the pocket-book which he always carried about him. He placed the little slip of printed paper in the same compartment in which Clare Carruthers's unconscious gift had so

long lain hidden. As George threw open the doors of the hansom in which he had been driven from the *Mercury* office to Piccadilly, Jim Swain came to the wheel, and, touching his tousled head, asked if he might speak to him.

“Certainly,” said George, getting out; “any message from Mr. Routh?”

“No, sir,” said Jim, “it’s not; it’s somethin’ very partic’lar, as I as ’ad to say to you this long time. It ain’t rightly about myself—and—”

“Never mind, Jim; you can tell me all about it in the house,” said George cheerily. “Come along.” He opened the door with his key, and let himself and Jim into the hall. But there Mr. Felton met him, his face grave and care-worn, and, as George saw in a minute, with some additional lines of trouble in it.

“I’m so glad you have come, George. I found letters here when I got back.”

“Letters from New York?”

“Yes.”

George left Jim standing on the mat, going with his uncle into the room he had just left.

Mr. James Swain, who was accustomed to pass

a good deal of his life in waiting about on steps, in passages, at horses' heads, and occasionally in kitchens, and to whom the comfortable hall of the house in Piccadilly presented itself as an agreeable temporary abode, considered it advisable to sit down and attend the leisure of Mr. Dallas. He had been for some minutes engaged partly in thinking what he should say to Mr. Dallas, partly in counting the squares in the tiles which floored the hall, hearing all the while a subdued sound of voices from the adjoining room, when a strange sort of cry reached his ears. He started up, and listened intently. The cry was not repeated; but in a few moments Mr. Felton came into the hall, looking frightened, and called loudly down the lower staircase for assistance. Two servants, a man and a woman, came quickly, and in the mean time Jim looked in at the open door. In another minute they were all in the dining-room in a confused group, gathered round an arm-chair, in which was lying the insensible death-like figure of George Dallas, his collar and necktie torn off, his waistcoat open, several letters on the table before him, and a card on the floor at his feet.

It was a very complete and dead swoon, and there was no explanation of it; none to be given to the servants, at least. Jim Swain did not touch George—he only looked on; and as, at the suggestion of the woman, they opened the window, and pushed the chair on which George was lying within the current of air, he picked up the card, over which one of the castors had passed. It was a small photographic portrait. The boy looked at it, and recognised, with surprise, that it was the likeness of Mr. Deane—that it was a fac-simile of a portrait he had looked at and handled a very little while ago. He put it down upon the table, and made to Mr. Felton the business-like suggestion that a doctor had better be sent for, and he had better be sent to fetch him, which was immediately acceded to.

When Jim returned, bringing with him a general practitioner, he was told that Mr. Dallas had “come to,” but was “uncommon weak and confused, and crying like a child when he wasn’t shivering,” so that Jim felt his chances of an interview were small indeed.

“I can’t see him, of course, and I wanted

to, most partic'lar. He brought me in, hisself.”

“ Yes, yes, I know,” said the male domestic, with importance; “ but you can't see him, and there's no good in your waiting about here. Look round at eleven to-morrow, and I'll see what can be done for you.”

Jim had nothing for it but to go disconsolately away. So he went.

While George Dallas and Clare Carruthers were talking together at Sir Thomas Boldero's house in Chesham-place, while the hours—never to be forgotten by either—were passing over them, the same hours were witnessing an interview not less momentous for Harriet Routh and her beautiful foe.

Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge was ready to receive her visitor; and as her coquetry and vanity were omnivorous, much as she despised women, and sincerely as she enjoyed the knowledge of her power to make most of them envious and miserable, she had dressed herself very carefully. She was just a little bored by her present mode of

existence. Routh could not be much with her; and though she had brought herself to believe that she really did feel an absorbing passion for him, somehow or other it left a good deal of her thoughts and her time unabsorbed, and she did not exactly know how to dispose of either. The romance of this kind of incognito life was all very well in its way, which was a pleasant way, and as far as it went, which certainly was very far, but not quite far enough. And she did get horridly bored, there was no denying it. When Routh's daily letter had been read—for she exacted that of him, of him who hated letter-writing, and whose hard actuality of nature needed all the incitement of her beauty, her coquetry, and her artfulness to rouse him to sentiment and give his language the eloquence of love—she had nothing but novels to fall back upon, and the vague prospect of a supplementary note or two, or trying on a new dress, or thinking what theatre she would go to, or what direction her afternoon drive should take. She was glad of the chance of seeing a new face, though it was only a woman's; and then the reason for receiving her was so sound, it was impos-

sible Routh could object. Indeed, she could not see the force of his objections to her going out more, and seeing people in general; it could not matter now, and would sound better hereafter than this hidden residence in London; however, it could not last long, and it was very romantic, very. She had not had much chance in all her previous prosperous life of playing at romance, and she liked it; she would not like it, if it continued to mean boredom, much longer, but there was no danger of that.

No. 4 Hollington-square was one of those London houses which every one knows, furnished for people who take houses for the season, prettily, flimsily, sparingly; a house which tenants with money and taste could make very striking and attractive, which tenants without money and without taste would find very tolerable in its original condition. Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge possessed both; and as she made it a rule to have every advantage procurable by the use of either, the drawing-room in which she awaited the coming of her visitor was as pretty and coquettish a room as could easily have been seen. She had chosen a

becoming costume, and an equally becoming attitude; and she looked beautiful indeed, in her rich morning dress of black silk, faced with rose-coloured satin and costly lace. The masses of her dark hair were coiled smoothly round her head, her white arms were without a jewel to turn the eye from their shapely beauty. She glanced at one of the many mirrors in the room as the page announced "a lady," and felt perfectly satisfied.

The room was long and narrow, though not large; and as Harriet walked from the door to the hearth-rug on which Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge stood, having gracefully risen in an attitude especially intended for her visitor's admiration, that lady had time to observe her appearance, and to experience a certain vague sense of discomfort not altogether unlike alarm. She saw a face which she remembered, but with which she could not connect any distinct recollection; a pale, fair, determined face with smooth light-brown hair framing a broad low brow, with keen piercing blue eyes, which looked steadily at her, and never dropped their fine fringed lids, blue eyes in which power, will, and knowledge dwelt, as the shallow-

souled woman they looked at, and through, felt, but did not understand. A face, so fixed in its expression of irremediable woe, a face so lost with all its self-possession, so full of despair, with all its might of will, that a duller intellect than that of a meagre-brained woman must have recognised a story in it such as happily few human beings have to tell or to conceal. Harriet did not speak, or make any sign of salutation; but when she had quite reached her, Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge recovered herself, and said with all her accustomed grace:

“I am so much obliged to you for calling. Pray take a seat. I think I know to what I am indebted for the pleasure of your visit;” and then she sank gracefully back into her low chair, and smiled her very best smile. The very best of those suited to the feminine capacity, of course. Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge had quite a different set of smiles for men.

“I am quite sure you do not,” said Harriet, in a low firm voice, and without availing herself of the invitation to be seated. “I am quite sure you have no notion of my business here. You shall know it; it is important, but brief.”

“Madam,” said the other, sitting upright, and turning slightly pale.

Harriet extended her hand with a gesture habitual to her, and said :

“Stay. You must hear me for your own sake. You will do well to hear me quietly, and to give me your very best attention. If I do not make the impression on you which I desire and intend to make, there is one other person beside myself who will suffer by my failure, and that person is you.”

She dropped her hand and drew her breath. Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge looked at her with frightened distended eyes, speechless.

“You think I have come on a false pretext, and I have done so, to a certain extent. You lost an article of ornament or dress at Homburg?”

“I did—a locket,” said Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge, a little relieved, and glancing unconsciously towards her silver purse, which was at hand, and through whose meshes gold shone.

“I know, but I have not brought you your locket. You lost something else at Homburg,

and I have brought it, to prove that you had better hear me, and that you must.” And then Harriet laid upon the table, near by the side of the silver purse, a crushed and faded flower, whose rich luscious blossom had been of the deepest crimson in the time of its bloom, when it had nestled against a woman’s silken hair.

“What is it? What do you mean? Good God, who are you?” said Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge, shrinking back as Harriet made the one step necessary to enable her to reach the table.

“I am Stewart Routh’s wife,” she replied, slowly, and without changing her tone, or releasing the other woman from her steady gaze.

This time Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge sprang to her feet, with a face as white as death.

“Don’t be frightened,” said Harriet, with the faintest glimmer of a contemptuous smile, which was the last expression having relation to Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge personally, that showed itself in her face, until the end. “I did not come here to inspire you with any fear of me; I did not come here on your account at all, or on mine; but for another motive.”

“What, what is it?” said her hearer, nervously reseating herself.

“My husband’s safety,” said Harriet; and as she spoke the words, Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge felt that an illusion was rolled away from her for ever. He belonged to this pale stern woman, whose unsparing eyes were fixed upon her, whose unfaltering voice had not a tone of doubt or weakness in it. In every line of her countenance was the assertion of her right, against which the other felt powerless, and in whose presence her self-confidence was utterly subdued.

Calm and still, Harriet Routh stood before her, her head bent forward, her hands clasped and pressed steadily against her waist.

“I have no time to lose,” she said, “and the briefest explanation will, in this case, be the best. When that flower fell from your hair over the balcony at the Kursaal at Homburg, it fell at my feet. I was on the terrace beneath. If once, during the time you and he stood there, my husband had looked away from you and over the rail, he would have seen me. But he did not. I had come to that particular spot accidentally, though I

was there that night because I suspected, because I knew, that he was there with you, and I would not condemn him unseen, unconvicted.”

Cowering before her, her pale face in her shaking hands, the other woman listened.

“I heard all he said to you. Don't start; it was very pretty. I know it all, by heart; every intonation, every hesitation—all the lying gamut from end to end. I heard all the story he told you of his marriage: every incident, every declaration, every sentiment, was a lie! He told you he had married a poor, passionate, silly girl, who had compromised herself through her undisciplined and unreturned love for him, for pity—for a man's pity for a woman! A lie. He told you his wife was an oddity, a nervous recluse, oblivious of all but her health and her valetudinarian fancies; that she had no love for him, or any one; no mind, no tastes, no individuality; that his life was a dreary one, and the oscillation of a heart which had never been hers towards so irresistible a woman as you (and he was right, so far; you are very, very beautiful—I saw that, and granted it to myself, at once) was no sin, no dishonesty, against her.

All a lie. Look at me, if you have the little courage needed for looking at me, and tell me if it *could* be true!"

Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge looked at her, but only to drop her head into her hands, and moan in the presence of the white face and the steady sparkling blue eyes.

"This was the lie he told you concerning me. The lie he told you about himself was more important in its results; and as it flattered you, of course you gave it ready credence. No doubt you believe it still, though you must know him better now. He told you a story of his misunderstood, undervalued life; of family pride, and grandeur, and wealth—of family ties severed in consequence of the charitable, chivalrous, self-sacrificing marriage he had made; of obscurity nobly borne and toil willingly encountered, of talents unremittingly exercised without fame or reward, of high aspirations and future possibilities, if only the agency of wealth and the incentive of *love* might be his. And this flimsy tale caught your fancy and your faith. It was so charming to fill the vacant place in the misunderstood man's life, so delightful to be

at once queen and consoler, to supply all the deficiencies of this deplorable wife. It was just the programme to catch the fancy of a woman like you, beautiful, vain, and empty.”

There was neither scorn nor anger in Harriet's voice ; there was merely a dash of reflection, as if she had strayed for a moment from the track of her discourse.

“ But it was all a lie,” she went on. “ His story of me, and his story of himself, were both equally false. Into the truth, as regards myself, I do not choose to enter. It is needless, and you are as incapable of understanding as you are indifferent to it. The truth about him I mean to tell you for his sake.”

“ Why ?” stammered the listener.

“ Because he is in danger, and I want to save him, because I love him—*him*, mind you, not the man you have fancied him, not the persuasive bland lover you have found him, no doubt ; for I conclude he has not changed the character he assumed that night upon the balcony ; but the hard, the cruel, the desperate man he *is*. I tell you”—she drew a little nearer, and again

Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge shrank from her—  
“he is a swindler, a liar, and a thief; he has lived by such means for years, was living by them when he married me. They are failing him now, and he feels the game is up here. What his exact plan is, of course I do not know; but that it includes getting you and your fortune into his power I have no doubt.”

Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge shivered now under the unsparing gaze. If only this woman would turn her eyes away from her, she thought, in the midst of her fear and amazement—the eyes that pierced her, that suffocated her, like the gripe of a fierce hand upon her throat. She did not know his plan. No; but who could look at her and doubt that, if she chose to know it, she could force the information from her hearer? Who could listen to her cold even tones, and dream of resisting their implacable power?

“Whatever his plan may be,” Harriet continued, “he is entirely absorbed in it, and he is indifferent to all beside. Mind, I don’t say you count for nothing in this: you are too vain to believe, I am too wise to say, anything of the

kind. But your beauty, which he likes, would never have tempted him to an insane disregard of his safety, would never have kept him here when the merest prudence should have driven him far away. He wants you, but he wants your money more urgently and desperately. He needs time to win you and it, no matter how he means to do it, and time is what he has not to give, time is the one stake it is ruin to him to risk in this game. Do you hear me? Do you understand me?"

The blank white face feebly looked a negative.

"No. Then I will put it more plainly. My husband, your lover, the man who is trying to ruin you in reputation, that he may have the power to ruin you in fortune, is in imminent danger. Flight, and flight alone, could save him; but he refuses to fly, because he will not leave *you*."

"What—what has he done?"

"He has been concerned in a robbery," said Harriet, with perfect composure, "and I know the police are on the right track, and will soon

come up with him. But he is desperate, and refuses to go. I did not know why until yesterday, when I found you had followed him from Homburg — by arrangement, of course. Tush, woman! don't try to deny it. What does it matter to me? A lie more or less, a villany more or less, makes no difference in him for me; but I knew then why he was obstinately bent on waiting for his fate."

"I—I don't believe you," said Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge; and she half rose from her chair, and stretched her hand towards the bell. But Harriet stopped her by the lifting of a finger.

"O yes, you do," she said; "you believe me implicitly. You have been afraid of this man—even when he has flattered you, and won upon you most; you have never felt sure of him, and you know I am telling you the truth. But you are weak, and you would like to think you had not been quite so egregiously deceived. I cannot, for his sake, leave you this comfort. You lost a locket at Homburg—a golden egg-shaped toy—with two portraits in it, one of yourself, the other of a young man, a countryman of yours,

an admirer. You prized the thing, you showed it to my husband, you talked of its value—is this true?”

“ Yes, yes, it is true—what then ?”

“ This then : he stole that locket from you, as he sat by you, in your carriage, and talked sentiment and compliment to you. He stole the locket—it does not sound nice or heroic ; he stole it, I tell you.”

“ Impossible—impossible.”

“ Am I in the confidence of your maid ? Do I know the contents of your jewel-case ? But this is folly, this is pretence ; you know in your soul that I am telling you the truth. And now for the reason of my telling it. If you think I am a jealous woman, come here to expose my husband to my rival, and take him from her by even such desperate means, you make my task harder, by giving me blind folly to deal with. I came with no thought of myself or you : though I do, indeed, save you by coming, I have no care, no wish to do so ; you are nothing to me, but a danger in his path. That his safety will be yours too, is your fortune, not my doing. I

care not; it might be your destruction, and it would be all one to me. I am not jealous of you; you are nothing to me, and he has long been lost to me. But he must not be lost to himself too, and for that I am here. I can do nothing with or for him more, but you can: he loves you, after his fashion, and you can save him."

"I—I save him—from what? how? what do you mean? If you have told me the truth, why should I, if I could?"

Calmly and contemplatively Harriet looked at her; calmly she said, as if to herself:

"And I am sure he thinks you love him! Wonderful, very wonderful; but," she went on with quicker utterance, "that does not matter. You can save him. I will answer your last question first: to convince you that this *must* be done, for your own sake, will save time. You did not know his character until now, but I think you know something of his temper; I think you understand that he is a desperate man. Suppose you break with him now—and your mind has been made up to do that for several minutes

—suppose you determine to save yourself from this swindler, this liar, this thief, to keep your character, and your money, and your beauty for a different fate, do you think he will let you go? How do you propose to escape him? You don't know. You are terribly frightened at the idea. I have come to tell you.”

“ You are a dreadful woman — you are a wicked, dreadful woman,” said Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge with a moan.

“ Yes,” said Harriet, “ I am a wicked, dreadful woman, but you need not fear me, though you have done me some wrong too, even according to your code, I think. Rouse yourself, and listen to me while I tell you what you must do.”

Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge tried to obey her; she shook back the hair which had fallen over her face, and looked up with eyes less scared, and more intelligent.

“ If my husband has not left England by to-morrow,” said Harriet with clear, distinct emphasis, “ it will be too late to save him from the clutches of the law. Nothing will induce him to leave England while you remain here. What!”

she said, with a sudden rush of burning red into her face and an indescribable fierce change of tone and manner. "What! You were going, were you—and together? Tell me instantly—instantly, I say—what is this I see in your face?"

Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge caught at Harriet's gown, and stammered:

"Don't, don't; I'll tell you!"

"Do you think I am going to strike you or kill you; do you think I would touch you with one finger?" said Harriet, in her former tone, and drawing her dress from the woman's grasp with a quiet determined movement. "Tell me instantly, and don't fear. You were going away—and together? Where were you going, and when?"

"To New York—on Saturday."

Harriet Routh turned abruptly from her, and for one minute's duration of awful silence her face was hidden. Then, with a sound like a sigh and a sob, but such a sound as the listener had never heard before, she resumed her former position. The other dared not look at her for many minutes. When she did, Harriet's face fixed

itself for ever on her memory as the ideal of the face of one who had died of sheer pain.

“ Thank you. The acknowledgment at least is brave and true, and makes the rest easy. Am I to conclude you do not wish now to carry out this arrangement ?”

“ O no, no. For God’s sake, save me !”

“ In saving *him*. Yes. You must leave England to-night, and he must follow you to-morrow. Don’t be frightened ; I said follow, not meet you. You must really go. No pretence will avail. He could not be deceived in this. You must cross the Channel to-night, and telegraph to him to-morrow from some French town, which you can leave upon the instant, if you choose. That is your own affair. You may return to England to-morrow night, if you please, and reach Liverpool in time to sail for New York on Saturday. Thus you will escape him, and be free. He will not follow you against your will to New York, where you are protected by your friends and your position. You have but to write and forbid his doing so.”

“ I think—I think I understand,” said Mrs.

Ireton P. Bembridge, in a voice full of submission and entreaty; "but how am I to account for going away?"

"At what hour do you expect him here to-day?" asked Harriet, in a business-like tone, without noticing the question.

"At nine in the evening."

"It is now nearly three. The tidal train for Folkestone starts at six. Your arrangements for next Saturday are all made, of course?"

"They are." Wonder and fear and a strange sense of dependence on this dreadful woman were growing on Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge with every moment.

"Then all is easy—if you can trust your maid."

"I can, implicitly; but what must she do?"

"Settle everything here, and take your luggage to Liverpool. You will not be able to make an hour's delay on your return; you must go straight through. You must travel without a servant for once—no—take your page; he is better out of the way—"

"I will do as you tell me; but you have not said how I am to account for going."

“No,” said Harriet, absently; “but that will be easy. He will think you a fool, and easily frightened, but your vanity must bear that—it’s not a heavy price to pay for safety.”

There was a pretty writing-table in the room, covered with elegant trifles. Harriet approached it, and opened a blotting-book. Some sheets of thick perfumed paper, with dainty monogram and motto, lay within it. On one of them she wrote as follows :

“All is discovered. Your wife has been here, and has terrified me by her threats. Our scheme must be abandoned. I cannot stay an hour here, not even to consult you; I am in fear of my life. Come to me at once, to Amiens. I leave to-night, and will telegraph from thence. If you do not join me on Saturday morning, I shall conclude you have given me up.”

She rose, and desired Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge to take her place.

“Copy that,” she said, briefly; but before the other took up the pen, she read the lines, and exclaimed :

“I dare not—I dare not; he will kill you.”

“That is *my* business,” said Harriet, fiercely.  
“Write!”

She copied the letter slowly, and trembling as she wrote, folded, sealed, and directed it.

“When is it to be sent?”

“When I have seen you off. I will take care he receives it,” said Harriet, as she put it in her pocket. “Now go and give your directions, and make your preparations.”

They looked at each other for a moment, and Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge left the room without another word. When she was alone, Harriet sat down by the table wearily, and covered her face with her hands. Time went on, but she did not move. Servants came in and went out of the room, but she took no notice. At length Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge entered in travelling dress, and with a paler face than any mirror she had ever looked into had ever reflected. At the same moment a carriage came to the door.

“You are quite ready?”

“I am.”

“It is time to go.”

“Let us go. One minute. Mrs. Routh, I—I

don't think I quite knew what I was doing. Can you forgive me?" She half extended her hand, then drew it back, as she looked into Harriet's marble face.

“Forgive you! What do you mean? You are nothing to me, woman; or, if anything, only the executioner of a sentence independent of you.”

Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge did not attempt to speak again. As they went out of the door, a telegram was handed to her. It was from Routh. “Impossible to see you to-night. Letter by post.”

She handed the paper silently to Harriet, who read it, and said nothing until they were seated in the carriage.

“Does that make any difference?” then asked Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge timidly.

“To *you*, none. Possibly it may to me; he need not know so soon.”

Not another word was spoken between them. Harriet stood on the platform at the railway station until the train moved off, and as Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge caught the last glimpse of her stern white face, she threw herself back in the carriage,

in which she was fortunately alone, in an hysterical agony of tears.

Routh did not come home that night ; he sent a message that business detained him in the City, and that he wished his letters and some clothes sent to him in the morning.

“ This is well,” said Harriet ; “ he is making his preparations, and he does not wish to see me before he must. The night can hardly pass without my hearing or seeing George.”

Late that evening Harriet posted the letter which Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge had written. But the evening and the night passed, and George Dallas did not come or send. The hours were full of the agony of suspense for Harriet. They brought another kind of suffering to Mr. Felton and his nephew.

At eight o'clock that evening George Dallas, alias Paul Ward, as the police phrase had it, was arrested at Mr. Felton's lodgings, charged with the murder of Mr. Felton's son. George's agent had done his work well, and the notes changed at Amsterdam, which the old bookseller's death had

released from their hiding-place and put in circulation, had furnished the clue to Mr. Tatlow's dexterous fingers. The notes bore Arthur Felton's initials; they had been paid to him by the Liverpool Bank; they were indorsed in full, with date too, by Paul Ward.

"And a case," said Mr. Tatlow, who had a turn for quotation, "neater, completer, in every feater, I don't think I ever was in."

## CHAPTER XI.

### AT THE TIDAL TRAIN.

“THERE’S a job for you to-day, Jim,” said the irreproachable Harris to Mr. James Swain, when he presented himself at half-past eight at Routh’s house, according to his frequent custom.

“I didn’t come after no jobs this mornin’,” said Jim; “I come to see the missis.”

“Ah, but you can’t see her, she ain’t up, and the job is particular wanted to be done.”

Jim looked moody and discontent, but cheered up when Harris represented that he might see Mrs. Routh on his return. The “job” was the delivery of Routh’s clothes and letters, as directed, at his chambers in Tokenhouse-yard. The boy was troubled in his mind, irresolute. George Dallas’s sudden illness, the photograph he had seen, these things added to the perplexity he was in already. Perhaps he had better speak to Mrs. Routh first;

he did not know ; at all events, he might tell her what had occurred yesterday, without mentioning the portrait, and see what effect it had upon her. He had thought about it all, until, between his imperfect knowledge of facts, his untaught intelligence, and his genuine but puzzled goodwill, he was quite bewildered. He had brought with him that morning, with a vague notion that it might perhaps be advisable to show it to Mrs. Routh, but a settled resolution to show it to Mr. Dallas, the object which he kept carefully secreted in the hole in the wall at home, and as he trudged away Citywards, carrying a small leather bag containing the required clothes and letters, he turned it over and over in his grimy pocket and grew more and more thoughtful and depressed.

Arrived at Tokenhouse-yard, the clerk took the bag from him, and suggested that he had better wait, in case Mr. Routh should require his further services. So Jim waited, and presently Routh came out into the passage. Jim's private opinion of Stewart Routh's character and disposition has been already stated ; of his personal appearance he entertained an equally low one, and much opposed

to the general sentiment. "An ill-looking, down-looking dog I call him," Jim had said to himself more than once; "more like the Pirate of the Persian Gulf, or the Bandit of Bokarer, I think, than anybody as I knows out of the pictures."

More ill-looking, more down-looking than ever Jim Swain thought Stewart Routh when he spoke to him that morning. His face was colourless, his eyes bloodshot, the glance troubled and wandering, his voice harsh and uneven. He gave Jim a brief order to meet him at the London-bridge railway-station the same evening, at a quarter to six. "I shall have a message for you," said Routh. "Be punctual, remember." And then he turned away abruptly and went into his room, shutting the door roughly.

"He ain't in the best of humours, even of his own, and they're none on 'em good," thought Jim, as he turned out of Tokenhouse-yard and took his way westward again, keeping his hand permanently in his pocket this time. A fresh disappointment awaited him at Routh's house. Mrs. Routh had gone out immediately after she had breakfasted.

Did she know he wanted to see her? Jim asked. Harris was rather tickled by the question.

“I say,” he remarked, “you’re getting on, Jim; you’ll be as impident as a cock sparrow presently. I didn’t happen to tell her; but if I ’ad, do you think she’d a stayed in to give you the chance?”

“Yes, I do; wot’s more, I’m sure she would,” said Jim, and walked moodily way, leaving Mr. Harris in a fine attitude of surprise upon the threshold. When that functionary finally left off looking after the boy, and shut the door, he did so to the accompaniment of a prolonged whistle.

It was only ten o’clock, and Jim had been told to go to Mr. Dallas’s at eleven. The interval troubled him; he could not settle his mind to the pursuit of odd jobs. He did not mind “hanging about;” he would hang about Piccadilly till the time came. But when Jim reached the house in which Mr. Felton and Mr. Dallas lodged, he was surprised to find it an object of lively curiosity to a number of persons who were crowding the pavement, notwithstanding the active interference of a policeman, endeavouring to clear a passage for two

ladies whose carriage was before the door, and one of whom was evidently in the deepest distress. Jim plunged at once into the heart of the concourse, and asked a number of eager questions, to which he received simultaneous but contradictory replies.

“He’s dead!” “No, he isn’t.” “He’s his brother, I tell you; I heard the cook a-tellin’ the milk-boy.” “He ain’t his brother; the old ’un’s his uncle; and he’s been and murdered his cousin.” Such were a few of the sentences Jim caught as his curiosity and anxiety rose to frenzy.

“*Wot* is it? *wot* is it? Do tell me. Is anything wrong with Mr. Dallas?” he asked imploringly of the servant who had opened the door to the two ladies (who had at last succeeded in entering the house), and was just about to shut it in the faces of a few scores of anxious inquirers endeavouring to pierce the depths of the hall, and to see through the dining-room doors. “Don’t you know me? I was here yesterday. I have been here before. I was to see Mr. Dallas at eleven. Can’t I see him? Is he worse?”

The woman did know the boy, and she at once admitted him.

“Come in,” she said; “I’ll tell you inside. It’s a deal worse than his health that’s the matter.” So Jim vanished into the house, a distinction which, being unattainable by themselves, was regarded with much indignation by the crowd. Temporarily dispersed by the active policeman, they gathered again, hoping the boy would come out, when they might pounce upon and extract information from him. But they waited in vain; the boy did not come out. The carriage still remained at the door, and in about an hour a gentleman of grave and busy aspect issued from the maddeningly mysterious mansion, stepped into the vehicle, and was driven rapidly away. The crowd was not in luck; no one heard the order given to the coachman. Then such silence and desolation as can ever fall on Piccadilly fell upon the scene, and the gay-looking, brightly-decorated house obstinately hid its secret.

The woman who recognised Jim told him the story of the events which had occurred, in the hall, speaking in a hurried whisper and with much genuine womanly compassion. Jim heard her

with a beating heart and shaking limbs. As the boy leaned against the wall, regardless of the damaging properties of his tousled head resting on the spotless paint, he wondered if this was like fainting, and whether he should be able to keep from "going off" like Mr. Dallas.

"We're strangers to Mr. Felton, of course," said the woman; "and it's natural everybody as can should like to keep their troubles to themselves, for it don't do no good tellin' of 'em, and people don't think no more of you; but there's things as can and things as can't be hid, and them as can't has been a takin' place here."

"Yes," said Jim, faintly; for the words he had heard in the crowd were ringing in his ears; "yes, yes; but tell me——"

"I'll tell you, as plain as I can make it out. Mr. Felton had some letters yesterday—letters as come from America—and there were a carte of his son in 'em; he hasn't seen nor yet heard of him for ever so long; and when Mr. Dallas see the carte he knew as the man was the same as was murdered, and never found out, in the spring."

"Well?" said Jim. "Yes? Go on." The

faint feeling was subsiding; he was beginning to understand.

“It were an awful shock for Mr. Dallas to find out as his cousin had been murdered, and to have to break it to the father; and no wonder he fainted over it. Nobody knows how he did it, but there must have been a dreadful scene; for I shouldn't ha' known Mr. Felton from the dead when I went to ask, through their not answering James's knock, whether they was a goin' to have any dinner. He was sittin' in his chair, white and quiet; and Mr. Dallas—he as had been took so bad himself in the beginnin'—he was kneeling on the ground beside him, and I think his arm was round his neck; but I couldn't see his face, for he only put out his hand, and says he, ‘No, thank you, Mary; go away for a little, please.’ I waited in the passage, but I never heard a word pass between them; and we didn't know whatever could be the matter, for we only knew about the letters after Mr. Dallas had been took up.”

“Mr. Dallas took up? They said that outside, but I thought it must be their larks. Wot-ever do you mean? Go on—go on; tell me, quick!”

“It’s quite true; no larks at all. It might be about eight or nine, and we was all sittin’ downstairs, a talkin’ about the parlours, and a very quick ring comes to the ’all-door. James opens it, and in comes two men, very short and business-like, which they must see Mr. Dallas, and can’t take no denial. So James goes to the door to ask if Mr. Dallas will see them, but they’re too quick for James, and walk in; and in two minutes there’s a great to do and explanation, and Mr. Dallas is took up.”

“But wot for?—wot had he done?” asked Jim.

“Murdered his cousin, don’t I tell you!” said the woman a little snappishly. “Ain’t I a-tellin’ of you as plain as I can speak. He’d been and murdered this other gentleman wot nobody knew, in the spring, and then he sets the police a lookin’ after his cousin, and just tells them enough to make them know as the other gentleman was him, which they’d never had a notion of before, so they come and took him on suspicion of the murder, and Mr. Felton went away with him. We was all there, when they put the handcuffs,

on him, and his uncle he stopped him in the 'all, as they was goin' to the cab, and says he, 'George, my boy, I do this, that no one may think I'm deceived;' and he put his hands on his shoulders and kisses him, as if he was a woman, before us all."

Jim listened, pale and breathless, but quite silent.

"Mr. Felton were out pretty near all night; and when he come 'ome, the gentleman as is here now were with him. He hasn't been to bed at all, and I haven't seen him, but just when I let the lady in, which she's a sweet-lookin' creature, and has been cryin' dreadful."

"Let me see Mr. Felton," said Jim, catching the woman by her dress, and speaking with the utmost eagerness and passion, "let me see him. I came to see Mr. Dallas about this business, let me see Mr. Felton."

"*You* came! why what have you got to do with it?" said the woman; her curiosity vehemently aroused.

"I will tell you all about it," said Jim, adroitly; "you shall hear it all afterwards—a cu-

r'ous story as any one ever had to tell. Mr. Dallas never did it—not he, *I* know better than that. I can tell Mr. Felton a great deal.”

“I must ask if he will see you,” said the woman; “if he won't, perhaps the lawyer—”

“No, no, it must be Mr. Felton himself. Let me into the room.”

She offered no resistance, and in another minute Jim was in the presence of a group composed of Mr. Felton, a graye gentleman, who looked like a lawyer, a beautiful girl, who was Clare Carruthers, and a plain, clever-looking young woman, who was Clare's cousin, Mrs. Stanhope. The lawyer and Mrs. Stanhope were seated by a table in close conversation, which they carried on in lower tones. Clare Carruthers and Mr. Felton stood upon the hearthrug, the girl's golden head was resting on her companion's shoulder, and she was crying silently but unrestrained.

“Is he very, very ill?” she had said, a little before Jim entered the room.

“Not seriously so, my dear, and indeed nothing could be more fortunate than that his

strength failed him so completely. It gives us time, and I need it, I am so bewildered even yet."

"Did Mr. Lowther say—say that he was not—not brought before the magistrates, not brought into that dreadful place, to-day?" said Clare, her voice hardly audible for her sobs.

"Yes, my dear. Think a little, I could not be here if he had not so much respite. Clare, I am a chief witness; I must be there, you know, to tell them about—about my son—" He paused, and closed his eyes for a few minutes.

"The case was called *pro formâ* this morning, but Mr. Lowther's partner, his brother, easily procured a delay. George was too ill to appear, but he sent me word that there was nothing seriously wrong."

"Can no one see him?" asked Clare imploringly. "O, Mr. Felton, can no one go to him? Can no one give him any comfort—help him to bear it? Are they so cruel as that, are they so cruel?"

"Hush, dear, it is not cruel; it is right. No one can see him or the present but Mr. Lowther—

Mr. James Lowther, who is with him now, I dare say, who will be here this afternoon."

"How can you bear it? how are you ever to bear it?" she said.

"My dear, I must bear it; and I have time before me in which to suffer: this is the time for action. You must help me, Clare, my dear, brave girl. I sent for you for this; I sent for you, at his desire, my child. His last words were, 'My mother, my mother, she is coming home tomorrow.' I told him to be satisfied, she should be kept from the knowledge of all this." He shuddered from head to foot. "Clare, are you strong enough to redeem my promise? Can you hide all that has happened from her? Can you be with her, watching her, keeping a calm face before her? My dear, have you strength for this?"

She lifted her golden head, and looked at him with her innocent fearless eyes.

"I have strength to do anything that he—that George desires, and you think is right."

"Then that is your share of our dreadful task, my dear. God knows it is no light or easy share."

Clare's tears streamed forth again. She nestled closer to him, and whispered :

“ Is there no—no hope ? ”

“ None,” he replied. “ If it had been possible for George to be mistaken, I have had the sight of my own eyes. Clare, they brought me my son's coat! Ay, like Jacob, they brought me my son's coat. My own last gift to him, Clare.” His eyes were dry and bright, but their sockets had deepened since the day before, and his voice had the febrile accent of intense grief and passion restrained by a powerful will.

“ What George must have suffered ! ” she said, still in a broken whisper, her tear-stained face upon his breast.

“ Ah, yes, it is all dim to me still. Mr. Lowther and I have been searching out the truth all night, but we are still in confusion. Tatlow is coming presently, and you must go away, my dear, you must go home. You have your share to do, and need strength to do it. You shall know all I learn from hour to hour. Mrs. Stanhope, will you—who is this? What brings you here, boy ? ”

“ Sir,” stammered Jim, who, though he had

the wizened mannish look peculiar to his tribe, was only a boy, and was desperately frightened—"sir, I came to tell you that I know the man as didn't do it, and I know the man as did."

Mr. Felton loosed his hold of Clare, and came forward. Mr. Lowther rose hurriedly from his seat; he did not share the blank, incredulous surprise of Mr. Felton. The two ladies drew near each other.

"Who are you?" asked Mr. Lowther.

Jim told him.

"What are you come for? What——" began Mr. Felton; but Mr. Lowther made a sign to him to be silent, and addressing Jim in a quiet, friendly voice, took him by the arm and led him to a chair.

"Sit down there, my boy," he said, "and don't be afraid. You must have come here of your own free will, and we do not doubt you have come for a good purpose. You have something important to tell Mr. Felton. You know Mr. Dallas, I think, and I gather from what you said just now that you know what he is accused of." Jim assented by a downcast nod. "There, tell us all about it. Take your time, and don't get fright-

ened." So saying, and giving the boy a reassuring pat upon the shoulder, the lawyer sat down upon a chair opposite to Jim, and spread his hands upon his knees in an attitude of serious, but not stern, attention. The two women looked on in silent suspense, and Mr. Felton, guided by a glance from Mr. Lowther, moved a little to the back of the chair on which Jim was seated.

"Come," said Mr. Lowther, giving him another pat, "we are all anxious to hear what you have got to say. Speak up, my boy."

"Sir," began Jim, "I should like to ask you something first. Is it true, as the gentleman at was murdered was Mr. Dallas's own cousin?"

"Only too true. He was Mr. Felton's son," and the lawyer eyed the unhappy father, as if measuring the strength he could command to bear this new trial. Mr. Felton came to Jim's side, and touched him kindly on the arm.

"Don't be afraid to speak before me," he said. "You may; and don't keep us waiting any longer. my good boy."

Then Jim made a desperate effort, and told his story; told it in his ignorant blundering fashion

told it with circumlocution and hesitation, but never interrupted. Mr. Lowther heard him without a word, and held Mr. Felton and the two women silent by the unspoken counsel of his glance.

“ I had done many an odd job at the house in South Molton-street,” said the boy, when he had told them a good deal about himself, in a rambling way, “ and I knowed Mr. Routh well, but I don’t suppose he knowed me ; and when I saw him a-lingerin’ about the tavern, and a-lookin’ in at the winder, he wosn’t no stranger to me. Well, he giv’ me the letter, and I giv’ it to the gentleman. He had a beard as came down in a point, and was sharp with me, but not so sharp as the waiter, as I giv’ *him* his own sauce, and the gentleman laughed, and seemed as if he didn’t object to me holdin’ of my own ; but Mr. Dallas, which I didn’t know his name then, he didn’t laugh, and he asks the gentleman if there weren’t no answer, and the gentleman says no, there weren’t none, and somehow I seemed to know as he wanted to spite Mr. Routh. So I felt cur’ous about it, partickler when I see as Mr. Routh looked savage when I came out of the coffee-room

and told him there weren't no answer. You must understand," said Jim, who had regained his composure now, and was in the full tide of his discourse, which he addressed exclusively to Mr. Lowther, with the instinctive delicacy which Harriet Routh had once observed in the neglected boy, "as I was not to say he was there, I were merely to give the note. He giv' me sixpence, and he went away down the Strand. I got a horse-holdin' job just then, and it were a long 'un; and there I was when the two gents came to the door, a-smokin' their cigars, and then the gent as I held his horse took him from me, and I hadn't nothing better to do than follow them, which I did; for who should I see but Mr. Routh a-skulkin' along the other side of the Strand, as if he wanted to keep 'em in sight without their seein' of him. I follered them, sir, and follered them feelin' as if I was one of them 'ere wild Ingins in the 'Alfpenny' *Alf-hours* on a trail, until I follered them to Boyle's billiard-rooms, as I knows it well, and had swep it often on a Sunday mornin'. They went in, and I was tired of hanging about, and was goin' away, when I see Mr. Routh again: there weren't nobody in the

street but him and me. I skulked into a lane, and watched him. I don't know why I watched him, and I don't know how long we was there—I a little way down the lane, and he a-saunterin' up and down, and lookin' at the doors and the windows, but never goin' nigh the house. It must ha' been very late when the two gents came out, and I was very tired; but the old woman—that's my aunt, sir—and me had had a row in the mornin', and I thought I'd like to giv' her a fright, and stay out all night, which I haven't often slep' in the streets, considerin'."

Jim had ceased to wriggle about on his chair, to twist his cap between his hands, and to shuffle his feet upon the floor. He was nearly as motionless as the listeners, who heard him in breathless silence. By degrees Clare had drawn nearer to Mr. Felton, and she was now standing, her hand in his, her head in its former place upon his shoulder, behind Jim's chair. But the character of the group formed by the two was no longer what it had been; the girl was supporting the man now; the girl was silently nerving him to courage and resolution.

“They came out, sir,” the boy continued, “very friendly-like and good-humoured, and Mr. Dallas he were a-laughin’, and he shook hands with the other gent, which he called hisself Mr. Deane—it were on the note; and he went away whistlin’ down the very lane as I was in, passed me close, and never saw me. I saw him, though, quite plain, and I thought, ‘You’ve been winnin’, and you likes it;’ but still I had my eye on Mr. Routh, and presently I sees him speakin’ to the other gent, as was puttin’ on his big fur coat, which it had a ’ood to it as I never see one like it afore. I thought they wouldn’t be pleasant together, and they wasn’t, not to judge by their voices, and I heerd the other gent give a sneerin’ kind of a laugh, which were aggravatin’; and soon they walked away together, through the Bar and up Fleet-street, and I follered ’em, for I thought I’d sleep under the dry arch of the bridge, and get a chance of odd jobs at the early trains in the mornin’, which they’re profitable if you ain’t too tired. They was talkin’ and talkin’, and the oddest thing was that I knew they was quarrellin’, though I couldn’t hear a word they said, and I

knew the other gent was a-sneerin' and a-aggeravatin' of Mr. Routh, and yet they was arm-in-arm all the time like brothers. They went on, and there wasn't a livin' bein' in the street but them and me and an odd p'liceman or so, wot took no notice, only beat their 'ands together and passed by. All on a sudden, when they wos near the bridge, and close to all the little narrow streets down there, I gets tired, and don't seem to care about follerin' of 'em; and then, while I'm thinkin' of makin' for the dry arch, I misses of 'em, and they're gone."

The boy stood up now, and his cap fell unheeded on the floor. The embarrassment, the confusion, the vulgarity of his manner were gone; he met the lawyer's piercing gaze unabashed; he lifted his hand and moved it with an expressive gesture.

"It was gettin' light overhead, and I was tired, and my head begin to turn. I sat down in a doorway; there wasn't no one to move me on, and I must ha' fell asleep, for I don't remember any more until I heard something pass by me very quick,—quite near me, as near as Mr.

Dallas passed me in the lane. I looked up pretty smart, and, sir, it were a man."

"Mr. Routh?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes, sir, it were Mr. Routh. His head were down, and he was goin' as quick as any man could walk, short of running, but he did not run. I roused up, and wondered where the other gent was, and then I see a narrow passage a little way off the doorway where I was a settin', leadin' straight to the river. I thought they must ha' turned down there to have their talk out, when I missed them so sudden. I went down the passage, and at the end of it was stones and mud and the river; and there was no one there. But O, sir,"—and here Jim began to tremble and to look nervously round towards Mr. Felton,—“there were blood on the edge of the stones, and footsteps in the mud where the water was a-creepin' up, and there was no one there.”

A convulsive sob burst from Clare's lips; but Mr. Felton clasped her closer to him, and kept her quiet.

“A dreadful sight—a dreadful discovery,”

said Mr. Lowther; "but, my boy," and again he touched Jim gently on the arm, "why did you conceal it? Did you not understand the crime that had been committed? Did you not know all that happened afterwards?"

"Sir," said Jim, boldly, but not without an effort, "I was not sure; I thought it might have been a fight, and that ain't murder anyways. I didn't know as how it had been stabbin' until I see it in *Lloyd's Weekly*, for I kep' away on purpose."

Here Jim put his hand into his pocket, and drew it out again closed round some object which he had still a lingering reluctance to show.

"I'll tell you all the truth, sir, though I dare say I must get into trouble. If it hadn't been as I was afraid of getting into it, I should ha' spoke before when I see Mrs. Routh, as is a good lady, a-frettin' herself to death, and him a-deceivin' of her. When I was a-looking close at the stones and the mud, and the blood upon 'em, which the tide was very nigh upon it afore I came away, I see something nearly stamped

into the mud as looked like gold, and I fished it out, and I knew it were something as I had seen hangin' on the other gent's chain, which he was a-twiddlin' on it with his fingers when I giv' him the note in the coffee-room. I fished it out, sir, and I kep' it, and I was afraid to take it to the pawnshop when I heerd as the body was found; and as it were a murder, I was afraid to sell it neither, and I hid it in the wall, and—and," said Jim, speaking with great rapidity and earnestness, "I am glad I've told the truth, for Mr. Dallas's sake, and I'm ready to suffer for it, if I must. Here it is, sir." Then the boy unclosed his hand, and placed in that of Mr. Lowther a locket in the form of a golden egg.

"It opens in the middle," said Jim, "and there's pictures in it: one is Mr. Deane's, and the other is a lady's. I know where she lives, and I saw Mr. Routh with her on Monday night. Mr. Routh has another, just the same as this,—on the outside anyways."

"Do you recognise this trinket?" asked Mr. Lowther of Mr. Felton, who replied :

“I do. It was my son’s.”

A few minutes of close and anxious consultation between the gentlemen followed, and then Mr. Lowther, telling Jim that he must remain with Mr. Felton until his return, went out, and was driven away in Mrs. Stanhope’s carriage. Mr. Felton and the two women treated the boy with kind consideration. In the frightful position in which they were all placed, there was now a prospect of relief, not, indeed, from the tremendous calamity, but from the dreadful danger, and Jim, as the medium through which the hope shone, was very valuable to them. Food was given him, of a quality rare to the street-boy, and he ate it with sufficient appetite. Thus the time passed, until Mr. Lowther returned, accompanied by a small smart man in a gray suit, who was no other than Mr. Tatlow, and whose first words to Mr. Felton were :

“It’s all right, sir. We’ve got the other warrant.”

Then Mr. Felton sent Clare and her cousin away, and Jim, having been cheered and con-

soled by many a reassuring word and promise from Mr. Felton, whose strength and self-control proved themselves to the utmost on this occasion, underwent a long and searching examination from Mr. Lowther and the self-congratulatory Tatlow.

The afternoon was already advanced, and Mr. Tatlow had gone away and returned again, when the boy's explanation was concluded, and the plans formed upon it were finally arranged. Then the lawyer's quick eye noticed symptoms of giving way in Mr. Felton. There were many hours of excitement and strain upon the nerves, still to be endured, and not yet might he be free to face the grief which was his—pre-eminently his; not yet must he seek solitude, to mourn for his only son. Anguish, fear, and fatigue were setting their mark upon him, but he must not yet have even bodily rest.

“You will not come with us?” said Mr. Lowther.

“No,” replied Mr. Felton, with an irrepresible shudder. “I could not see that man before *I must.*”

“You will lie down and rest?”

“Not yet. I will rest to-night. I must see my brother-in-law, who will reach London this evening, and tell him all that has happened.”

“Your brother-in-law?”

“Mr. Carruthers, my sister’s husband. Much depends on George’s mother being kept in ignorance, and Mr. Carruthers must be prepared.”

During this short dialogue, Jim had been speaking eagerly to Mr. Tatlow, apparently urging very strongly an earnest appeal. On its cessation, Mr. Tatlow addressed Mr. Lowther.

“He agrees to everything, if one of you gentlemen will write to Mrs. Routh for him. That’s it, ain’t it?” said he, turning again to Jim.

“Yes, sir,” said the boy, with an earnestness of entreaty in his voice and his look which touched the listeners. “If one of you will write to *her*. I don’t mean a letter of your own—grand like—for then she mightn’t believe it, and she might think as I was paid. I did it for Mr. Dallas; but I don’t think as I should have done it if he hadn’t been bad to her, and if I hadn’t

seen her a-dyin' day after day, as courageous as can be, but still a-dyin', and he a-neglectin' of her first and deceivin' of her after."

"She is this man's accomplice," said Mr. Lowther, moodily.

"Perhaps so, to a certain extent," said Mr. Felton; "but she is to be pitied, too. I saw that. I saw a little way into her life at Hom-burg, and, from all George has told me, I would be as little hard with her as possible. He cannot escape us, she cannot shield him; let us hear what the boy wishes to say to her, and then decide. Tell me," he said, kindly, to Jim, "what do you wish to say to this lady?"

"You must understand," said Mr. Tatlow, "that you can't send your letter till we've got him."

"I don't want to, sir," said Jim. "I think as he's runnin' away from her to-night, partik'lar as the lady is gone."

(Mr. Tatlow had ascertained the fact of Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge's departure during his brief absence.)

"He didn't go home last night, and I think

as he's afraid to face her, and is runnin' away to-night."

"Very well, then," said Mr. Lowther, "I will write the letter. You shall tell me what to say, and it shall be sent to her this evening."

So Jim dictated, with infinite difficulty and astonishing slowness, and Mr. Lowther wrote :

*"Dear Ma'am,—This comes from Jim Swain, as wouldn't like to hurt you, but has to tell at last, because of Mr. Dallas being took for what he didn't do. I wanted to see you to-day, but you was out, and I couldn't, and I come down here and heard of Mr. Dallas being took. You weren't in it, dear ma'am, I'm sure, and so I have told the gentlemen and Mr. Tatlow, which has me in charge at present; but you know it, and that Mr. Dallas did not do it, and Mr. Routh did. I followed them all the night it was done, and I saw Mr. Deane and Mr. Routh going down to the river, and I went down to the river, when one was gone away alive and the other couldn't be found, only his blood on the stones, and I found the gold thing he had on his chain, which the gentleman has it now, and Mr. Routh have the same in a little drawer in the*

*big desk in the parlour. I haven't hid anything, dear ma'am, and Mr. Routh will be took, at six o'clock, at the railway, where he told me to meet him, which so I am to do. I know about a lady, too, which her picture is in the gold thing, and I would have told you about her if I could have seen you to-day. I hope you won't be hurt. I didn't mean to do it to hurt you. I wish I hadn't been so secret so long."*

When Jim had formally made his mark, the letter was sealed and directed, and Mr. Lowther took charge of it.

Considerably before the platform of the London-bridge railway-station, from which the tidal train for Folkstone was about to start, had received the usual crowd of passengers and their friends, a lady, plainly dressed and closely veiled, made her unobtrusive appearance upon it. "I am waiting to see a friend off," she had said, as the official at the barrier questioned her, and she attracted no further notice. Slowly and with down-cast eyes, and hands which clasped each other closely under her shawl, she walked up and down,

keeping close to the wall, and allowing the groups, as they began to form, to form between her and the edge of the platform. Once or twice she unclasped her hands, and lifted her veil, and breathed deeply, then after one piercing glance, which comprehended every face under the roof within its vision, dropped it again. Once, as she did this, a nursemaid with a child in her arms at the back of the platform noticed her, and said to a fellow-servant :

“ That woman’s face is enough to frighten one ; she looks like death ! ”

But life was strong in Harriet Routh, and hope was strong in her also, a terrible hope, indeed, which to any suffering less than hers would have worn the semblance of despair. A little while now and he would be safe, safe for the present, for the next few hours which were so all-important. The letter she had written, telling him all she had done, and why, would await him at Amiens, and show him that all his plans were vain, would convince him at last. The arrangement of his money matters, which he must have made for the flight he contemplated, would avail in

the case of this flight which she had imposed upon him. A little more torture, a little more suspense, and something like rest would come. Perhaps she should be able to sleep a little to-night, while he would be speeding through the darkness to safety. Something like a forlorn sense of peace came to her with the anticipation. So she walked up and down, thinking these thoughts, and sometimes lapsing into a mental blank, out of which condition she would come with a start, to go into a kind of vision of the last two days—of the woman she had so completely mastered—of the last time she had seen her husband's face—of the blow he had struck her; but she felt no anger in the remembrance; what did it matter now, in the face of this great crisis? It was strange that she had heard nothing of George, and the fact rendered her only the more eager and apprehensive. He was busy with the investigation, which must end in—what? In that which she had now effectually prevented. So she walked up and down, thinking, and the platform became peopled, and all the fuss and hurry of the departure of the tidal train was around her. Presently, as she reached the end of

the platform, and turned, to resume her walk, she saw her husband, coming quickly towards the line of carriages, carrying the small bag which had been sent to him at Tokenhouse-yard in the morning, and which she had packed with reference to this occasion. Routh, indeed, had been not a little surprised by its contents. He came along the platform, the bag in one hand, a letter in the other, looking frowningly round, as though in search of somebody. She shrank back, as much out of sight as possible. Presently, just as he was stepping into a carriage, Jim Swain appeared, and went up to him. A few words passed between them, and then Harriet saw two persons, one of whom was a smart, slightly built man in a gray suit, address him. Straining her eyes with a fixed intensity of gaze which made her brain ache, she looked. He tore the letter in his hand to pieces, with inconceivable quickness, the fragments fluttering to the ground, turned, and with one of his unknown interlocutors on either side, and Jim following—how strange the boy looked, Harriet thought—walked along the platform, passed through the barrier, and was lost to her gaze at the distant entrance.

Harriet stood rooted to the spot. It was not until all the passengers had taken their places, and the train had gone off with a shriek and a pant, that she had the power to move. Then a moan of utter despair burst from her white lips, and a cold thrill shook her limbs, as she murmured :

“ He has been called back on business, and he is lost, utterly lost.”

## CHAPTER XII.

### “STRONG AS DEATH.”

UNSPEAKABLE terror laid its paralysing grasp upon Harriet; upon her heart, which ceased, it seemed to her, to beat; upon her limbs, which refused to obey the impulse of her will. Alone she stood upon the platform, long after the train had disappeared, and thought failed her with the power of movement; a blank fell upon her. A porter addressed her, but she stared stupidly in his face, and made no reply.

“The lady’s ill,” the man said to another; “I had better take her to the waiting-room, and fetch a cab. If you’ll come this way, ma’am—”

Then Harriet’s faculties awoke with a start. “No, thank you,” she said; “I must get home.” And she walked swiftly and steadily away. Two of the superior officials were talking together close

to the door through which she had to pass, and she heard one of them say :

“Very quietly done, if it was so ; and I’m pretty sure it was ; I couldn’t be mistaken in Tatlow.”

The words conveyed no meaning, no alarm to Harriet. She went on, and out into the crowded street. She walked a long way before she felt that she could bear the restraint, the sitting still implied by driving in any vehicle. But when she reached Tokenhouse-yard, and found that nothing was known there of Routh, that no message had been received from him since he had left that evening, she got into a cab and went home. No news there, no message, no letter. Nothing for her to do but wait, to wait as patiently as she could, while the servants speculated upon the queer state of affairs, commented upon “master’s” absence on the preceding night, and hoped he had not “bolted”—a proceeding which they understood was not uncommon in the case of gentlemen of Routh’s anomalous and dim profession. Nothing for her to do but to wait, nothing but the hardest of all tasks, the most agonising of all sufferings. And

this was the night which was to have brought her, with utter despair for herself, rest. Rest of body, which she had never so sorely needed, and had never felt so impossible of attainment. Her iron strength and endurance were gone now. Her whole frame ached, her nerves thrilled like the strings of a musical instrument, a terrible interior distraction and hurry came over her at intervals, and seemed to sweep away her consciousness of reality without deadening her sense of suffering. She did not now wonder whether she was going mad; since she had known the very, very worst of her own fate, that fear had entirely left her. She wondered now whether she was dying. Wondered, with some curiosity, but no fear; wondered, with a vague feeling of the strangeness of the irruption of utter nothingness into such a chaos of suffering and dread as life had become to her. There would be rest, but not the consciousness of it; she would no more exist. A little while ago she would have shrunk from that, because love remained to her; but now—If she could but know the worst, know the truth, know that he could not be saved, or that he was safe, she would

not care how soon she ceased to be one of the facts of the universe. *She* had never mattered much ; she did not much matter now. But these thoughts crossed her mind vaguely and rarely ; for the most part it was abandoned to the tumultuous agony of her ignorance and suspense. Still no letter, no message. The time wore on, and it was nine o'clock when Harriet heard a ring at the door, and a man's voice asking to see Mrs. Routh. It was not a voice she knew ; and even while she eagerly hoped the man might have come to her from Routh, she trembled at the thought that he might be the bearer of a communication from George Dallas, for whose silence she had been thankful, but unable to account.

The man was a clerk from Mr. Lowther's office, and his errand was to deliver to Mrs. Routh a letter, "on very important business," he said, which he had directions to give into her own hands. He executed his commission, retired promptly, and Harriet was left alone to find the solution of all her doubts, the termination of all her suspense, in Jim Swain's letter.

The approaches to the Mansion House police-court, and the precincts of the court itself, were densely crowded. All sorts of rumours prevailed respecting the reported discovery of the mystery which had perplexed the police and the public in the spring. The arrest of two persons at different places, and the reports, garbled, exaggerated, and distorted as they were, of the circumstances which had led to the discovery which directed suspicion towards the second of the two accused persons, had keenly excited the public curiosity. The proceedings of the coroner's inquest upon the body of the unknown man had been raked up and read with avidity; and the oozing out of even the smallest particulars relative to the two prisoners was eagerly watched for by the greedy crowd. Curiosity and expectation were obliged to satisfy themselves for the nonce with the proceedings in the case of Stewart Routh. George Dallas was unable to appear; since the previous day his illness had materially increased, and the official medical report pronounced it to be brain fever. Unconscious of the tremendous danger in which he stood, oblivious even of the frightful discovery

which had struck him so heavy a blow, George Dallas lay, under suspicion of a dreadful crime, in prison-ward, and under prison watch and care. So attention and curiosity centred themselves in Stewart Routh, and the wildest stories were propagated, the wildest conjectures ran riot.

The prisoner had been brought up, with the customary formalities, at an early hour, and the examination, which was likely to last some time, had begun, when Mr. Felton, who was in the court with Mr. Carruthers, pressed that gentleman's arm, and whispered :

“Look there! To the left, just under the window. Do you see her?”

“I see a woman—yes,” replied Mr. Carruthers.

“His wife!” said Mr. Felton, in a tone of compassionate amazement. It was his wife. Thus Routh and Harriet found themselves face to face again. As the prisoner's eye, shifting restlessly around him, seeing curious faces, full of avidity, but not one ray of compassion, fell upon her, every trace of colour faded out of his cheek, and he drew one deep, gasping breath. Had she betrayed him? He should soon know;

the story about to be told would soon enlighten him. Did he really think she had done so? Did he really believe it for one minute? No. He had tried, in the blind fury of his rage, when he found himself trapped, balked, hopelessly in the power of the law, and the game utterly up—when, in the loneliness of the night, he had brooded savagely over the hopes he had entertained, over the dazzling pictures his fancy had painted, then he had tried to accuse her, he had hated and execrated her, and tried to accuse her. But in vain; he was not a fool, villain as he was, and his common sense forbade the success of the attempt. And now, when he saw her, her from whom he had last parted with a cruel blow, and a word that was more cruel, it was as though all his past life looked out at him through her woful blue eyes. Awfully it looked at him, and held him fascinated, even to a brief oblivion of the scene around him. She had raised her veil, not quite off her face, but so that he could see her distinctly, and when he looked at her, her lips parted, in a vain heroic attempt to smile. But they only quivered and closed again, and she

knew it, and drew the veil closely round her face, and sat thenceforth, her head falling forward upon her breast, her figure quite motionless.

The ordinary business of the place and the occasion went on, intensified in interest to the spectators by the presence of the murdered man's father, in the sensational character of a witness. Harriet's relation to the prisoner was not divined by the public, and so she passed unnoticed.

Jim Swain was, of course, the chief witness, and he told his story with clearness and directness, though he was evidently and deeply affected by the sight of Harriet, whom his quick eye instantly recognised. She took no notice; she did not change her position, or raise her veil as the examination of the boy proceeded, as minute by minute she heard and felt the last chance, the last faint hope of escape, slip away, and the terrible certainty of doom become clearer and more imminent. She heard and saw the boy whose story contained the destruction of hope and life, showed her the utter futility of all the plans they had concocted, of all the precautions they had taken; showed her that while they had fenced

themselves from the danger without, the unsuspected ruin was close beside them, always near, wholly unmoved. It had come, it had happened; all was over, it did not matter how. There was no room for anger, no power of surprise or curiosity left in her mind. As the golden locket was produced, and the identity of the portrait with that of the murdered man was sworn to, a kind of vision came to her. She saw the bright spring morning once more, and the lonely bridge; she saw the river with the early sunlight upon it; she saw herself leaning over the parapet and looking into the water, as the parcel she had carried thither with careful haste sank into the depth and was hidden. She saw herself returning homeward, the dangerous link in the evidence destroyed, passing by the archway, where a boy lay, whom she had pitied, even then, in her own great and terrible anguish. If anything could be strange now, it would be strange to remember what he then had in his possession, to render all her precaution vain. But she could not feel it so, or think about it; all things were alike to her henceforth, there was no strangeness or fami-

harity in them for evermore. Occasionally, for a minute, the place she was in seemed to grow unreal to her, and to fade; the next, she took up the full sense of the words which were being spoken, and every face in the crowd, every detail of the building, every accident of the scene, seemed to strike upon her brain through her eyes. She never looked at Jim, but she saw him distinctly; she saw also the look with which Routh regarded him.

That look was murderous. As the boy's story made his motives evident, as it exposed the fallacious nature of the security on which Routh had built, as it made him see how true had been Harriet's prevision, how wise her counsel—though he hated her all the more bitterly as the knowledge grew more and more irresistible—the murderous impulse rose to fury within him. Standing there a prisoner, helpless, and certain of condemnation, for he never had a doubt of that, the chain he had helped to forge by his counsel to Dallas was too strong to be broken; he would have taken two more lives if he had had the power and the chance—the boy's, and that accursed woman's.

Not his wife's, not Harriet's ; he knew now, he saw now, she had not brought him to this. But the other, the other who had tempted him and lured him ; who had defeated him, ruined him, and escaped. He knew her shallow character and her cold heart, and his fierce, vindictive, passionate, sensual nature was stirred by horrid pangs of fury and powerless hate as he thought of her—of the triumphant beauty which he had so coveted, of the wealth he had so nearly clutched—triumphant, and happy, and powerful still, while he—he—! Already the bitterness and blackness of death were upon him.

And the boy ! So powerful, even now, was the egotism of the man's nature, that he winced under the pain of the defeat the boy had inflicted upon him—winced under the defeat while he trembled at the destruction. He had kept him near him, under his hand, that if the need should arise he might use him as an instrument for the ruin of George Dallas, and so had provided for his own ruin. The active hate and persistent plan of another could not have worked more surely against him than he had himself wrought,

and the sense of the boy's instrumentality became unbearably degrading to him, wounding him where he was most vulnerable.

Thus all black and evil passions raged in his heart; and as his wife looked in his face, she read them there as in a printed book, and once again the feeling of last night came over her, of the strangeness of a sudden cessation to all this, and also something like a dreary satisfaction in the knowledge that it was within her power and his to bid it all cease—to have done with it.

Looking at him, and thinking this, if the strange dream of her mind may be called thought, the curiosity of the crowd began to anger her a little. What was the dead man to them, the nameless stranger, that they should care for the discovery—that they should come here to see the agony of another man, destined, like the first, to die? The popular instinct filled her with loathing, but only momentarily; she forgot to think of it the next minute, and the vagueness came again, the film and the dimness, and again the acute distinctness of sound, the intensity of vision.

It was over at length. The prisoner was com-

mitted for trial. As he was removed with the celerity usual on such occasions, Harriet made a slight sign to the solicitor acting for Routh—a sign evidently preconcerted, for he approached the magistrate, and addressed him in a low voice. The reply was favourable to his request, and he, in his turn, signed to Harriet, who left her place and came to where he was standing. He placed her in the box, and she stood there firmly, having bowed to the magistrate, who addressed her:

“ You are the prisoner’s wife ?”

“ I am.”

“ You wish to speak to me ?”

“ I wish to ask your permission to see my husband before he is removed.”

“ You may do so. Take care of the lady.”

This to one of the officials. The tone of the magistrate’s reply to Harriet was compassionate, though he spoke briefly ; and he looked intently at her as she bowed again and turned meekly away. He has said, since then, that he never saw supreme despair in any face before.

“ You have not much time,” the policeman said, not unkindly, who conducted her to the lock-

up cell where Routh was. She made no answer, but went in, and the door was locked behind her. He was sitting on a bench exactly in front of the door, and the moment she passed it her eyes met his. Fury and gloom were lowering upon his face; he looked up sullenly at her, but did not speak. She stood by the door, leaning against it, and said, in a low tone:

“I have but a little time they tell me. I am come to learn your will. It was agreed between us, once, that if the worst came, I should supply you with the means of disposing of your fate. I remembered that agreement, and I have brought you *this*.

She put her hand to her bosom, and took out of her dress a small phial. It contained prussic acid, and was sealed and stoppered with glass.

He started and groaned, but did not yet speak.

“The worst *has* come,” she said. “I do not say you ought not to face it out, still I only do as you once desired me to do in such a case. The decision is with yourself. This is my only opportunity of obeying you, and I do so.”

“The worst has come,” he said, in a hoarse

voice, not in the least like his own ; “ you are sure the worst has come ? He said it was a bad case, a very bad case. Yes, the worst has come.”

Her hand was stretched out, the phial in it. He made no attempt to take it from her. She held it still, and spoke again :

“ I have very little time. You will be searched presently, they tell me, and this will be found, it may be. I have obeyed you to the last, as from the beginning.”

“ There’s no chance—you are quite sure there is no chance ?”

“ I am quite sure there is no chance. I have always known, if this happened, there could be no chance.”

He muttered something under his breath.

“ I do not hear you,” she said. “ You are reproaching me, I dare say, but it is not worth while. If you make no use of this, you will have time to reproach me as much as you like. If you do make use of it, reproach is past, with time and life. Have you decided ?”

“ No,” he said ; “ give it to me. If I use it, it must be very soon—if not, never.”

She laid the phial on the bench beside him, and he took it up, and placed it in his breast-pocket. She did not touch him, but when she had laid the phial down, stepped back, and leaned against the door.

“Is there anything you want to know—anything I can tell you?” she asked. “Again, my time is very short.”

“No,” he said; “if I make up my mind to go through this, I shall know all I want; if I don’t, I need not know anything.”

“Just so,” she said, quietly. He looked on the ground, she looked at him.

“Harriet,” he said, suddenly, “I am sorry, I——”

“Hush,” she said, flushing scarlet for one brief moment, and putting out her hand. “No more. All is over, and done with. The past is dead, and I am dead with it. Not a word of me.”

“But if—if——” he touched his coat-pocket. “I must first know what is to become of you.”

“Must you?” she said, and the faintest possible alteration came in her voice—a little, little softening, and a slight touch of surprise. “I think

you might have known that I shall live until I know you are no longer living."

"Sorry to interrupt you, ma'am," said the policeman who had brought Harriet to the cell, unlocking the door with sharp suddenness—"very sorry, I'm sure; but——"

"I am quite ready," said Harriet; and, as Routh started up, she turned, and was outside the door in an instant. Two policemen were in the passage; at the door through which she had been led from the court, Routh's solicitor was standing. He took her arm in his, and brought her away by a private entrance. They did not speak till she was in the street, where she saw, at a little distance, a crowd collected to watch the exit of the prison-van. He called a cab.

"Where to?"

"My house."

"I will go with you."

"No, thank you. Indeed, I would rather go alone."

"I shall see you this evening."

She bent her head in reply.

When she was seated in the cab she put out

her hand to him, and as she leaned forward he saw her awful face.

“God help you, Mrs. Routh,” he said, with intense pity. Then she said, in a clear low voice, whose tone he remembers, as he remembers the face, these words :

“There is no God. If there were, there could be no such men as he, and no such women as I.”

When she was a short distance from the police-court, and beyond the solicitor's sight, she called to the driver from the window that she had changed her purpose, and desired to be set down at St. Paul's Churchyard.

The arrival of the prison-van at Newgate excited the usual sensation which it produces among the public who congregate in the neighbourhood of the prison, to see it discharge its wretched contents; the majority of the crowd were, as usual, of the dangerous classes; and it would have afforded matter of speculation to the curious in such things to look at their faces and calculate, according to the indices there given, how many of the number would one day take a personal part in a spectacle

similar to that at which they were gazing with a curiosity which renewed itself daily. On this occasion the sentiment prevalent on the outside of the grim fortress of crime was shared in an unusual degree by the officials, and general, not criminal, inhabitants. Not that a supposed murderer's arrival was any novelty at Newgate, but that the supposed murderer in the present instance was not of the class among which society ordinarily recruits its murderers, and the circumstances both of the crime and of its discovery were exceptional. Thus, when the gate unclosed by which the prisoners were to be admitted, the yard was full of spectators.

Four prisoners were committed that day: a burglar and his assistant; a merchant's clerk who had managed a forgery so remarkably cleverly that it needed only not to have been found out, to have been a stroke of brilliant genius; and Stewart Routh. The door was opened, the group of spectators gathered around. First the burglar, a wiry little man, more like the tailor of real life than the conventional hero of the centre-bit and the jemmy. Next, his assistant, an individual of jovial appear-

ance, tempered with responsibility, like a popular president of school feasts, or the leader of a village choir. Thirdly, the forger, remarkable for nothing in his appearance except its abjectness of fright and bewilderment. These had emerged from the darksome recesses of the hideous caravan, the first and no slight instalment of their punishment, and had been received with comparative indifference. A passing glance was all that was accorded to them by the spectators waiting the appearance of the "gentleman" who was in such very serious "trouble."

But the gentleman did not follow his temporary associates, though the policeman in attendance held the door open, and called to him to "come on." Then he stepped into the van and up to the compartment in which Routh had been placed. After an elapse of a full minute he emerged, and addressing the lookers-on generally, he said :

"There's something queer the matter with him, and I think he's dead !"

A stir and confusion among the crowd, and the governor called for. A matter-of-fact turnkey advances, saying, in a business-like tone :

“Haul him out, and let’s see.”

They do haul him out, and they do see. His face is rather bluish in colour, and his eyes are open, but his hands are clenched, and his tongue is rigid. And he is quite dead. So there is a great sensation around the prison. The senseless figure is carried into the prison, the door is promptly shut, and the rumour spreads through the crowd, trying to find chinks which do not exist, and to hear sounds inaudible, that the “murder” case is disposed of, the prisoner having tried, condemned, and executed himself. And, though the incident is highly sensational, the general feeling is disappointment.

A woman, plainly dressed and closely veiled, who has been lingering about the street for some time, and was there when the van arrived, has seen the figure lifted from the van and has heard the rumour. But she waits a little while longer, until a policeman comes out of a side-entrance, and while some eager inquirers, chiefly women, question him, and he tells them it is quite true, the man committed for trial for the river-side murder is really dead, she stands by and listens.

Then she draws her shawl closely round her, and shivers, and goes away. After she has taken a few steps, she falters and sways a little, but she leans against the wall, her hands pressed upon her breast, but quietly, attracting no attention, until she has regained her composure and her breath, and then goes on, along the street, and so out into Holborn.

“She has not been seen or heard of, at his chambers or at home,” said Mr. Carruthers to Mr. Felton late that evening. “Nothing is known of her. They say she has no friends; I could not find out from the servants that she has a single acquaintance even to whose house she could have gone.”

Mr. Felton was infinitely distressed by this news which Mr. Carruthers, whose active benevolence, guided by the judgment of others, knew no bounds, brought to his brother-in-law, who was at length exhausted, and unable to rise. They had heard early in the afternoon of the death of Routh, and had at once been aroused to the warmest compassion for Harriet. Clare, having left the un-

conscious Mrs. Carruthers tranquilly asleep, had gone to Mr. Felton's lodgings, and was there when her uncle came in with his report.

"Laura has no suspicion?" asked Mr. Felton.

"Not the slightest. She has no notion that you and George are not still in Paris. I must say Clare is an admirable girl to keep a secret and play a part."

Clare blushed a little at her uncle's praise.

"What is to be done now about this unfortunate woman? She must be found. Apart from every other consideration, George would be infinitely distressed if any harm came to her."

"I really don't know," said Mr. Carruthers. "There seems to be no clue to her probable movements, and——Come in." This was in answer to a knock at the door.

Jim Swain came in, his face full of eagerness:

"Have you found her, sir? Is she at home? Does she know?"

"No, Jim," said Mr. Felton, "she's not at home, and no one knows anything of her."

"Sir," exclaimed Jim—"miss, I'm sure she's somewheres about the prison. Has any one

thought of lookin' for her there? She'd go there, sir and miss—she'd go there. Take me with you, and let us go and look for her. I daren't go alone; she wouldn't listen to me, she wouldn't look at me; but I'm sure she's there."

"Uncle," said Clare, earnestly, "I am sure he is right—I feel sure he is right. Pray go; take one of the servants and him. The carriage is waiting for me; take it and go."

Mr. Carruthers did as she desired. It was wonderful to see the change that had come over him with the awakening of his better nature. He had always been energetic, and now he forgot to be pompous and self-engrossed.

The streets in the dismal quarter of the prison were comparatively silent and empty when Mr. Carruthers called to the coachman to stop, and got out of the carriage, Jim descending from the box, and they began their dismal search. It was not prolonged or difficult.

They found her sitting on the ground, supported by the prison wall, in an angle where after nightfall there was little resort of footsteps and but dim light—a corner in which the tired wayfarer

might rest, unquestioned, for a little, by either the policeman or the passer-by. And no more tired wayfarer had ever sat down to rest, even in the pitiless London streets, than the woman who had wandered about until the friendly night had fallen, and had then come there to die, and have done with it.

They took her to her own home, and when they removed her shawl a slip of paper, on which George Dallas's name was written, was found pinned to the front of her dress. It contained these words :

“The boy's story is true. I did not keep the diamonds taken out of the studs. You sold them when you sold your mother's. I was always sorry you ever knew us. H. ROUTH.”

\* \* \* \* \*

George Dallas is in New York with Mr. Felton, who is winding-up all his affairs, with a view to a permanent residence in England. Jim Swain, whose education includes the art of writing now, is attached to the personal service of Mr. Dallas, who is understood to be his uncle's heir.

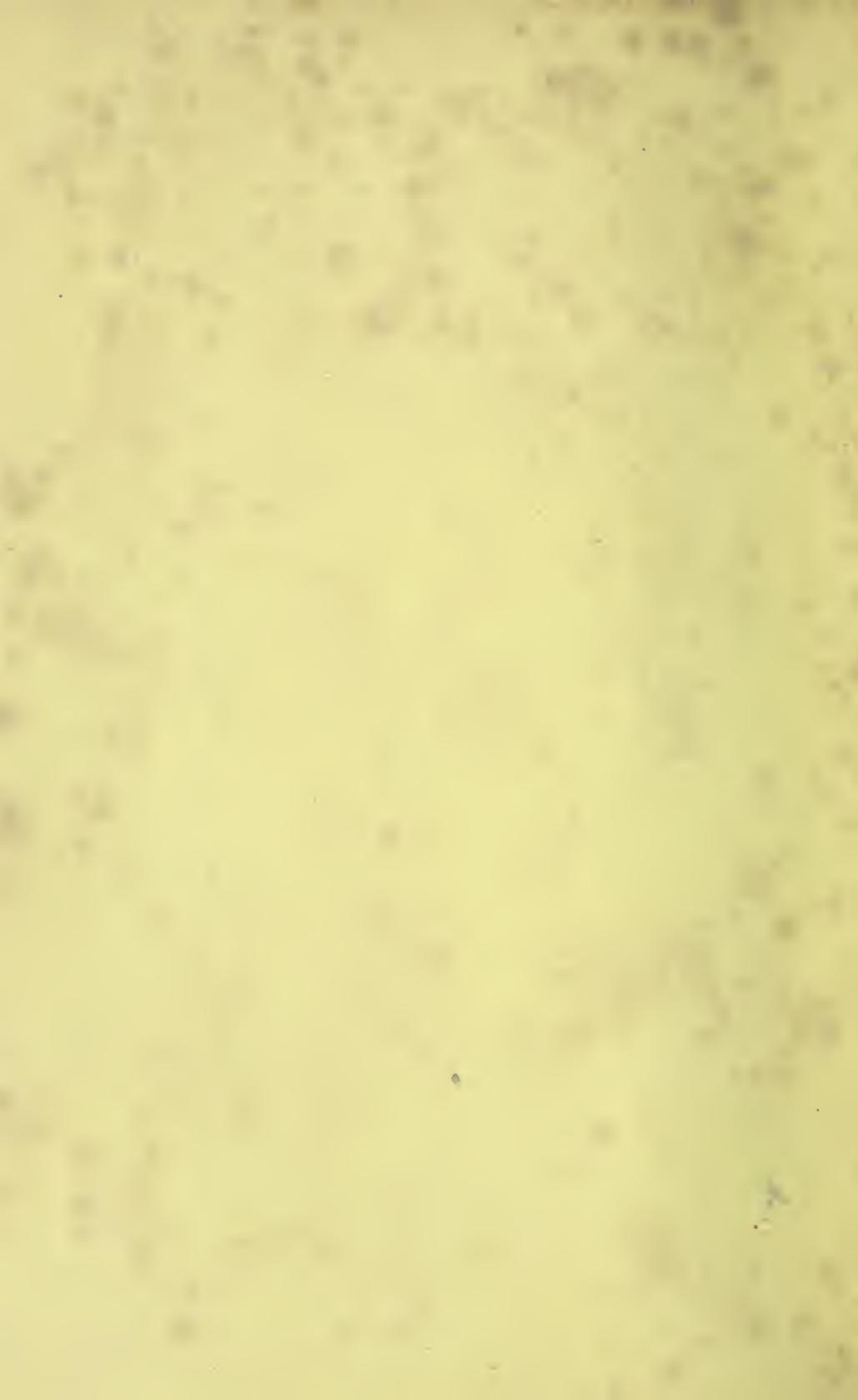
Miss Carruthers is at Poynings, not to be tempted by London and its pleasures; but the absence of the young and beautiful heiress is not so deeply deplored by "society" as it would be, were it not generally known that she is engaged.

THE END.

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