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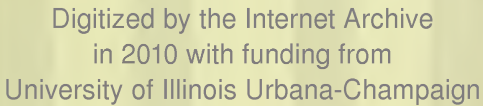
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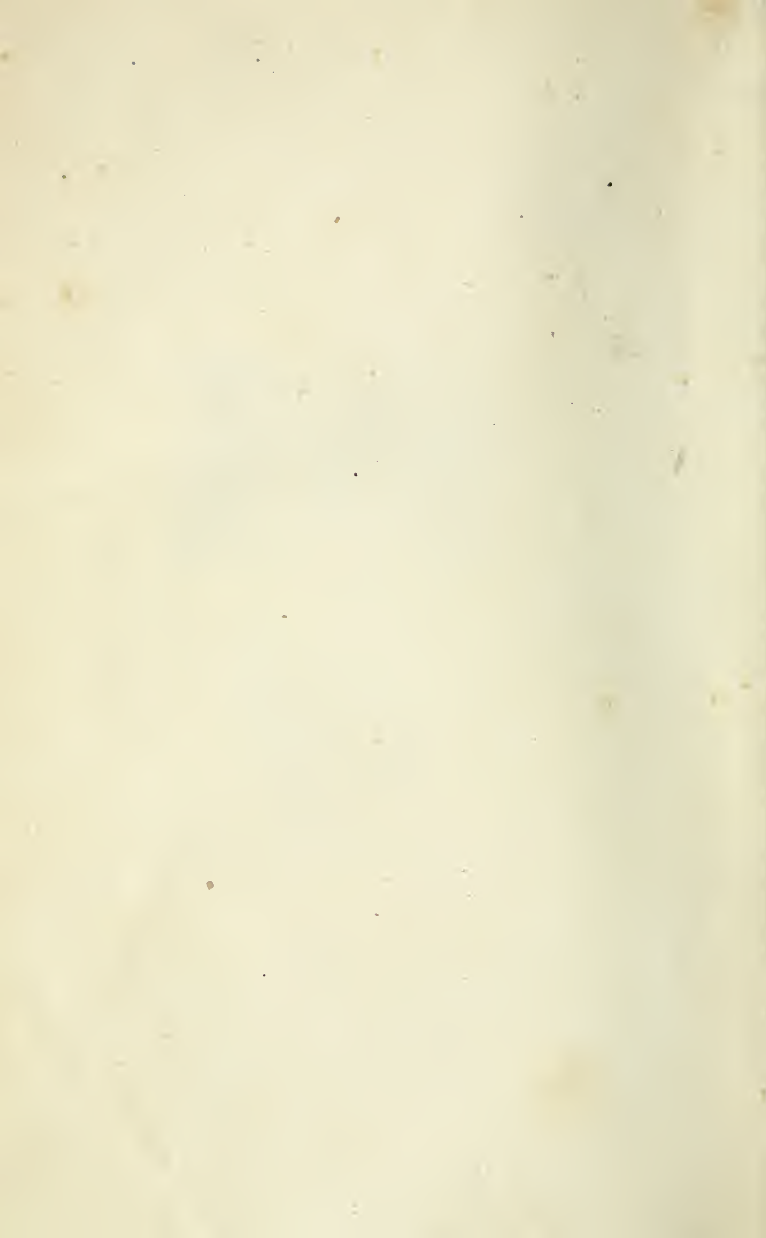

LAND AT LAST.

A Novel

IN THREE BOOKS.

BY

EDMUND YATES,

AUTHOR OF "BROKEN TO HARNESS," "RUNNING THE GAUNTLET," ETC.

"Post tenebras lux."

BOOK II.—Breakers Ahead.

LONDON:

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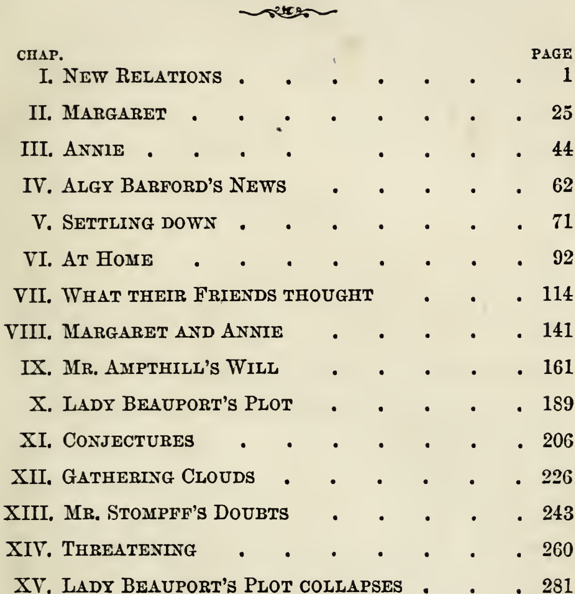

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LAND AT LAST.

Book the Second.

CHAPTER I.

NEW RELATIONS.

THE fact of her having a daughter-in-law whom she had never seen, of whose connections and antecedents she knew positively nothing, weighed a good deal on Mrs. Ludlow's mind. "If she had been an Indian, my dear," she said to her daughter Matilda, "at least, I don't mean an Indian, not black you know; of course not—ridiculous; but one of those young women who are sent out to India by their friends to pick up husbands,—it would be a different matter. Of course, then I could not have seen her until she came over to England; and as Geoff has

never been in India, I don't quite see how it could have happened; but you know what I mean. But to think that she should have been living in London, within the bills of thingummy—mortality, and Geoff never to bring her to see me, is most extraordinary—most extraordinary! However, it only goes to prove what I've said—that I have a cross to bear; and now my son's marrying himself in a most mysterious and Arabian-nights-like manner is added to the short-weight which we always get from the baker, and to the exceeding forwardness shown by that young man with the pomatumed hair and the steel heart stuck into his apron, whenever you go into the grocer's shop."

And although Miss Matilda combated this idea with great resolution, albeit by no means comfortable in her own mind as to Geoffrey's proceedings, the old lady continued in a state of mind in which indignation at a sense of what she imagined the slight put upon her was only exceeded by her curiosity to catch a glimpse of her son's intended; under the influence of which

latter feeling she even proposed to Til that they should attend the church on the occasion of the marriage-ceremony. "I can put on my Maltese-lace veil, you know, my dear; and if we gave the pew-opener sixpence, she'd put us into a place in the gallery where we could hide behind a pillar, and be unseen spectators of the proceedings." But this suggestion was received with so much disfavour by her daughter that the old lady was compelled to abandon it, together with an idea, which she subsequently broached, of having Mr. Potts to supper,—giving him sprats, or tripe, or some of those odd things that men like; and then, when he was having a glass of spirits-and-water and smoking a pipe, getting him to tell us all about it, and how it went off. So Mrs. Ludlow was obliged to content herself with a line from Geoffrey,—received two or three days after his marriage, saying that he was well and happy, and that his Margaret sent her love ("She might have written that herself, I think!" said the old lady; "it would have been only respectful; but perhaps she can't write. Lord, Lord! to think

we should have come to this!"),—and with a short report from Mr. Potts, whom Til had met, accidentally of course, walking one morning near the house, and who said that all had gone off capitally, and that the bride had looked perfectly lovely.

But there was balm in Gilead; and consolation came to old Mrs. Ludlow in the shape of a letter from Geoffrey at the end of the first week of his absence, requesting his mother and sister to see to the arrangement of his new house, the furniture of which was all ordered, and would be sent in on a certain day, when he wished Til and his mother to be present. Now the taking of this new house, and all in connection with it, had been a source of great disquietude and much conversation to the old lady, who had speculated upon its situation, its size, shape, conveniences, &c., with every one of her little circle of acquaintance. "Might be in the moon, my dear, for all we know about it," she used to say; "one would think that one's own son would mention where he was going to live—to his mother, at least: but Geoff is that tenacious, that

—well, I suppose it's part of the cross of my life." But the information had come at last, and the old lady was to have a hand, however subordinate, in the arrangements; and she was proportionately pleased. "And now, Til, where is it, once more? Just read the letter again, will you?—for we're to be there the first thing to-morrow morning, Geoff says. What?—O, the vans will be there the first thing to-morrow morning! Yes, I know what the vans' first thing is—eleven o'clock or thereabouts; and then the men to go out for dinner at twelve, and not come back till half-past two, if somebody isn't there to hunt them up! The Elm Lodge, Lowbar! Lowbar? Why, that's Holloway and Whittington, and all thaf turn-again nonsense about the bells! Well, I'm sure! Talk about the poles being asunder, my dear; they're not more asunder than Brompton and Lowbar. O, of course that's done that he needn't see more of us than he chooses, though there was no occasion for that, I'm sure, at least so far as I'm concerned; I know when I'm wanted fast enough, and act accordingly."

"I don't think there was any such idea in Geoff's mind, mamma," said Til; "he always had a wish to go to the other side of town, as he found this too relaxing."

"Other side of town, indeed, my dear!—other side of England, you mean! This side has always been good enough for me; but then, you see, I never was a public character. However, if we are to go, we'd better have Brown's fly; it's no good our trapesing about in omnibuses that distance, and perhaps taking the wrong one, and I don't know what."

But the old lady's wrath (which, indeed, did not deserve the name of wrath, but would be better described as a kind of perpetual grumble, in which she delighted) melted away when, on the following morning, Brown's fly, striking off to the left soon after it commenced ascending the rise of Lowbar Hill, turned into a pretty country road, and stopped before a charming little house, bearing the name "Elm Lodge" on its gate-pillars. The house, which stood on a small eminence, was approached by a little carriage-sweep; had a little lawn in

front, on which it opened from French windows, covered by a veranda, nestling under climbing clematis and jasmine; had the prettiest little rustic portico, floored with porcelain tiles; a cosy dining-room, a pretty little drawing-room with the French windows before named, and a capital painting-room. From the windows you had a splendid view over broad fields leading to Hampstead, with Harrow church fringing the distant horizon. Nobody could deny that it was a charming little place; and Mrs. Ludlow admitted the fact at once.

"Very nice, very nice indeed, my dear Til!" said she; "Geoffrey has inherited my taste—that I will say for him. Rather earwiggy, I should think, all that green stuff over the balcony; too much so for me; however, I'm not going to live here, so it don't matter. Oh! the vans have arrived! Well, my stars! all in suites! Walnut and green silk for the drawing-room, black oak and dark-brown velvet for the dining-room, did you say, man? It's never—no, my dear, I thought not; it's *not* real velvet,—Utrecht,

my dear; I just felt it. I thought Geoff would never be so insane as to have real; though, as it is, it must have cost a pretty penny. Well, he never gave us any thing of this sort at Brompton; of course not."

"O, mother, how can you talk so!" said Til; "Geoff has always been nobly generous; but recollect he's only just beginning to make money."

"Quite true, my dear, quite true; and he's been the best of sons. Only I should have liked for once to have had the chance of showing my taste in such matters. In your poor father's time every thing was so heavy and clumsy compared to what it is nowadays, and—there! I would have had none of your rubbishing Cupids like that, holding up those stupid baskets."

So the old lady chattered on, by no means allowing her energy to relax by reason of her talk, but bustling about with determined vigour. When she had tucked up her dress, and got a duster into her hand, she was happy, flying at looking-glasses and picture-frames, and rubbing off infinitesimal atoms of dirt; planting herself resolutely in every

body's way, and hunting up, or, as she termed it, "hinching," the upholsterer's men in the most determined manner.

"I know 'em, my dear; a pack of lazy carpet-caps; do nothing unless you hinch 'em;" and so she worried and nagged and hustled and drove the men, until the pointed inquiry of one of them as to "who *was* that *h*old cat?" suggested to Miss Til the propriety of withdrawing her mother from the scene of action. But she had done an immense deal of good, and caused such progress to be made, that before they left, the rooms had begun to assume something like a habitable appearance. They went to take one more look round the house before getting into Brown's fly; and it was while they were upstairs that Mrs. Ludlow opened a door which she had not seen before—a door leading into a charming little room, with light chintz paper and chintz hangings, with a maple writing-table in the window, and a cosy lounge-chair and a *prie-dieu;* and niches on either side the fire-place occupied by little book-cases, into which the foreman of the upholsterers was placing a number

of handsomely-bound books, which he took from a box on the floor.

"Why, good Lord! what's this?" said the old lady, as soon as she recovered her breath.

"This is the budwaw, mum," said the foreman, thinking he had been addressed.

"The what, man? What does he say, Matilda?"

"The budwaw, mum; Mrs. Ludlow's own room as is to be. Mr. Ludlow was most partickler about this room, mum; saw all the furniture for it before he went away, mum; and give special directions as to where it was to be put."

"Ah, well, it's all right, I daresay. Come along, my dear."

But Brown's horse had scarcely been persuaded by his driver to comprehend that he was required to start off homewards with Brown's fly, when the old lady turned round to her daughter, and said solemnly:

"You mark my words, Matilda, and after I'm dead and gone don't you forget 'em—your brother's going to make a fool of himself with this

wife of his. I don't care if she were an angel, he'd spoil her. Boudoir, indeed!—room all to herself, with such a light chintz as that, and maple too; there's not one woman in ten thousand could stand it; and Geoffrey's building up a pretty nest for himself, you mark my words."

Two days later a letter was received from Geoffrey to say that they had arrived home, and that by the end of the week the house would be sufficiently in order, and Margaret sufficiently rested from her fatigue, to receive them, if they would come over to Elm Lodge to lunch. As the note was read aloud by Til, this last word struck upon old Mrs. Ludlow's ear, and roused her in an instant.

"To what, my dear?" she asked. "I beg your pardon, I didn't catch the word."

"To lunch, mamma."

"O, indeed; then I did catch the word, and it wasn't your mumbling tone that deceived me. To lunch, eh? Well, upon my word! I know I'm a stupid old woman, and I begin to think I live in heathenish times; but I know in my day

that a son would no more have thought of asking his mother to lunch than—well, it's good enough for us, I suppose."

"Mamma, how *can* you say such things! They're scarcely settled yet, and don't know any thing about their cook; and no doubt Margaret's a little frightened at first—I'm sure I should be, going into such a house as that."

"Well, my dear, different people are differently constituted. I shouldn't feel frightened to walk into Buckingham Palace as mistress to-morrow. However, I daresay you're right;" and then Mrs. Ludlow went into the momentous question of "what she was to go in." It was lucky that in this matter she had Til at her elbow; for whatever the old lady's taste may have been in houses and furniture, it was very curious in dress, leaning towards wild stripes and checks and large green leaves, with veins like caterpillars, spread over brown grounds; towards portentous bonnets, bearing cockades and bows of ribbon where such things were never seen before; to puce-coloured gloves, and parasols rescued at an alarming sa-

crifice from a cheap draper's sale. But under Til's supervision Mrs. Ludlow was relegated to a black-silk dress, and the bonnet which Geoffrey had presented to her on her birthday, and which Til had chosen; and to a pair of lavender gloves which fitted her exactly, and had not those caverns at the tips of the fingers and that wrinkled bagginess in the thumbs which were usually to be found in the old lady's hand-coverings; and as she took her seat in Brown's fly, the neighbours on either side, with their noses firmly pressed against their parlour-windows, were envious of her personal appearance, though both of them declared afterwards that she wanted a "little more lighting-up."

When the fly was nearing its destination, Mrs. Ludlow began to grow very nervous, a state which was exhibited by her continually tugging at her bonnet-strings and shaking out the skirt of her dress, requesting to be informed whether she was "quite straight," and endeavouring to catch the reflection of herself in the front glasses of the fly. These performances were scarcely over be-

fore the fly stopped at the gate, and Mrs. Ludlow descending was received into her son's strong arms. The old lady's maternal feelings were strongly excited at that moment, for she never uttered a word of complaint or remonstrance, though Geoff squeezed up all the silk skirt which she had taken such pains to shake out, and hugged her until her bonnet was all displaced. Then, after giving Til a hearty embrace, Geoff took his mother's hand and led her across the little lawn to the French window, at which Margaret was waiting to receive her.

Naturally enough, old Mrs. Ludlow had thought very much over this interview, and had pictured it to herself in anticipation a score of times. She had never taken any notice of the allusions to the likeness between her daughter-in-law that was to be and the Scylla-head which Geoff had painted; but had drawn entirely upon her own imagination for the sort of person who was to be presented to her. This ideal personage had at various times undergone a good deal of change. At one time she would appear as

a slight girl with long fair hair and blue eyes ("what I call a wax-doll beauty," the old lady would think); then she would have large black eyes, long black hair, and languishing manners; then she would be rather plain, but with a finely-developed figure, Mrs. Ludlow having a theory that most artists thought of figure more than face; but in any case she would be some little chit of a girl, just the one to catch such a man as our Geoff, who stuck to his paintings, and had seen so little of the world.

So much for Mrs. Ludlow's ideal; the realisation was this. On the step immediately outside the window stood Margaret, a slight rose-flush tinting her usually pale cheeks just under her eyes; her deep-violet eyes wider open than usual, but still soft and dreamy; her red-gold hair in bands round her face, but twisted up at the back into one large knot at the top of her head. She was dressed in a bright-blue cambric dress, which fell naturally and gracefully round her, neither bulging out with excess of crinoline, nor sticking limply to her like a bathing-gown; across her

shoulders was a large white muslin-cape, such as that which Marie Antoinette is represented as wearing in Delaroche's splendid picture; muslin-cuffs and a muslin-apron. A gleam of sun shone upon her, bathing her in light; and as the old lady stood staring at her in amazement, a recollection came across her of something which she had not seen for more than forty years, nor ever thought of since,—a reminiscence of a stained-glass figure of the Virgin in some old Belgian cathedral, pointed out to her by her husband in her honeymoon.

As this idea passed through her mind, the tears rose into Mrs. Ludlow's eyes. She was an excitable old lady and easily touched; and simultaneously with the painted figure she thought of the husband pointing it out,—the young husband then so brave and handsome, now for so many years at rest,—and she only dimly saw Margaret coming forward to meet her. But remembering that tears would be a bad omen for such an introduction, she brushed them hastily away, and looked up in undisguised admiration at the hand-

some creature moving gracefully towards her. Geoffrey, in a whirl of stuttering doubt, said, "My mother, Margaret; mother, this is—Margaret—my wife;" and each woman moved forward a little, and neither knew what to do. Should they shake hands or kiss? and from whom should the suggestion come? It came eventually from the old lady, who said simply, "I'm glad to see you, my dear;" and putting one hand on Margaret's shoulder, kissed her affectionately. There was no need of introduction between the others. Til's bright eyes were sparkling with admiration and delight; and Margaret, seeing the expression in them, reciprocated it at once, saying, "And this is Til!" and then they embraced, as warmly as girls under such circumstances always do. Then they went into the house, Mrs. Ludlow leaning on her son's arm, and Til and Margaret following.

"Now, mother," said Geoff, as they passed through the little hall, "Margaret will take you upstairs. You'll find things much more settled than when you were here last." And upstairs the women went accordingly.

When they were in the bedroom, Mrs. Ludlow seated herself comfortably in a chair, with her back to the light, and said to Margaret:

"Now, my dear, come here and let me have a quiet look at you. I've thought of you a thousand times, and wondered what you were like; but I never thought of any thing like this."

"You—you are not disappointed, I hope," said Margaret. She knew it was a dull remark, and she made it in a constrained manner. But what else was she to say?

"Disappointed! no, indeed, my dear. But I won't flatter you; you'll have quite enough of that from Geoffrey. I shall always think of you in future as a saint; you're so like the pictures of the saints in the churches abroad."

"You see you flatter me at once."

"No, my dear, I don't. For you are like them, I'm sure; not that you're to wear horsehair next your skin, or be chopped up into little pieces, or made to walk on hot iron, or any thing of that sort, you know; but I can see by your face that

you're a good girl, and will make my Geoff a good wife."

"I will try to do so, Mrs. Ludlow," said Margaret, earnestly.

"And you'll succeed, my dear. I knew I could always trust Geoff for that; he might marry a silly girl, one that hadn't any proper notions of keeping house or managing those nuisances of servants; but I knew he would choose a good one. And don't call me 'Mrs. Ludlow,' please, my dear. I'm your mother now; and with such a daughter-in-law I'm proud of the title!" This little speech was sealed with a kiss, which drove away the cloud that was gathering on Margaret's brow, and they all went down to lunch together. The meal passed off without any particular incident to be recorded. Margaret was self-possessed, and did the honours of her table gracefully, paying particular attention to her guests, and generally conducting herself infinitely better than Geoff, who was in a flurry of nervous excitement, and was called to order by his mother several times for jumping up to fetch things when he ought to have

rung the bell. "A habit that I trust you'll soon break him of, Margaret, my dear; for nothing goes to spoil a servant so quickly; and calling over the bannisters for what he wants is another trick, as though servants' legs weren't given them to answer bells." But Mrs. Ludlow did not talk much, being engaged during the intervals of eating, in mentally appraising the articles on the table, in quietly trying the weight of the spoons, and in administering interrogative taps to the cow on the top of the butter-dish to find if she were silver or plated, in private speculations as to which quality of Romford ale Geoffrey had ordered and what he paid for it, and various other little domestic details whereto her experience as a household manager prompted her. Geoffrey too was silent; but the conversation, though not loud, was very brisk between Margaret and Til, who seemed, to Geoff's intense delight, to have taken a great fancy for each other.

It was not until late in the afternoon, when the hour at which Brown's fly had been ordered was rapidly approaching, and they were all seated

in the veranda enjoying the distant view, the calm stillness, and the fresh air, that the old lady, who had been looking with a full heart at Geoffrey —who, seated close behind Margaret, was playing with the ends of her hair as she still kept up her conversation with Til—said:

"Well, Geoffrey, I don't think I ought to leave you to-night without saying how much I am pleased with my new daughter. O, I don't mind her hearing me; she's too good a girl to be upset by a little truthful praise—ain't you, my dear? Come and sit by me for a minute and give me your hand, Margaret; and you, Geoff, on the other side. God bless you both, my children, and make you happy in one another! You're strange to one another, and you'll have some little worries at first; but you'll soon settle down into happiness. And that's the blessing of your both being young and fresh. I'm very glad you didn't marry poor Joe Telford's widow, Geoff, as we thought you would, ten years ago. I don't think, if I had been a man, I should have liked marrying a widow. Of course every one has their

little love-affairs before they marry, but that's nothing; but with a widow it's different, you know; and she'd be always comparing you with the other one, and perhaps the comparison might not be flattering. No; it's much better to begin life both together, with no past memories to— why, Geoffrey, how your hand shakes, my dear! What's the matter? it can't be the cold, for Margaret is as steady as a rock."

Geoffrey muttered something about "a sudden shiver," and just at that moment the fly appeared at the gate. So they parted with renewed embraces and promises of meeting again very shortly; Geoffrey was to bring Margaret over to Brompton, and the next time they came to Elm Lodge they must spend a long day, and perhaps sleep there; and it was not until Brown's fly turned the corner which shut the house out of sight that Mrs. Ludlow ceased stretching her head out of the window and nodding violently. Then she burst out at once with her long-pent-up questioning.

"Well, Matilda, and what do you think of

your new relation? I'm sure you've been as quiet as quiet; there's been no getting a word out of you. But I suppose you don't mind telling your mother. What *do* you think of her?"

"She is very handsome, mamma, and seems very kind, and very fond of Geoff."

"Handsome, my dear! She's really splendid! There's a kind of *je ne sais quoi* about her that—and tall too, like a duchess! Well, I don't think the Wilkinsons in the Crescent will crow any longer. Why, that girl that Alfred Wilkinson married the other day, and that they all went on so about, isn't a patch upon Margaret. Did you notice her cape and cuffs, Matilda? Rather Frenchified, I thought; rather like that nurse that the Dixons brought from Boulogne last year, but very pretty. I hope she'll wear them when she comes to spend the day with us, and that some of those odious people in the Crescent will come to call. Their cook seems to have a light hand at pie-crust; and *did* you taste the jelly, my dear? I wonder if it was made at home; if so, the cook's a treasure, and dirt-cheap at seventeen,

and every thing found except beer, which Margaret tells me is all she gives! I see they didn't like my arrangement of the furniture; they've pulled the grand-piano away from the wall, and put the ottoman in its place: nice for the people who sit on it to rub the new paper with their greasy heads!"

And so the old lady chattered on until she felt sleepy, and stumbled out at her own door in an exhausted state, from which the delicious refreshment of a little cold brandy-and-water and a particularly hard and raspy biscuit did not rouse her. But just as Til was stepping into bed her mother came into the room, perfectly bright and preternaturally sharp, to say, "Do you know, my dear, I think, after all, Geoffrey was very fond of Joe Telford's widow? You were too young then to recollect her; for when I was speaking about her to-night, and saying how much better it was that both husband and wife should come fresh to each other, Geoff's hand shook like an aspen-leaf, and his face was as pale as death."

CHAPTER II.

MARGARET.

Margaret had carried out what she knew would be the first part of the new programme of her life. During their short honeymoon, Geoffrey had talked so much of his mother and sister, and of his anxiety that they should be favourably impressed with her, that she had determined to put forth all the strength and tact she had to make that first meeting an agreeable one to them. That she had done so, that she had succeeded in her self-imposed task, was evident. Mrs. Ludlow, in her parting words, had expressed herself delighted with her new daughter-in-law; but by her manner, much more than by any thing she had said, Geoff knew that his mother's strong sympathies had been enlisted, if her heart had not been entirely won. For though the old lady so far gave

in to the prejudices of the world as to observe a decent reticence towards objects of her displeasure —though she never compromised herself by outraging social decency in verbal attacks or disparaging remarks—a long experience had given her son a thorough appreciation of, and power of translating, certain bits of facial pantomime of a depreciatory nature, which never varied; notably among them, the uplifted eyebrow of astonishment, the prolonged stare of "wonder at her insolence," the shoulder-shrug of "I don't understand such things," and the sniff of unmitigated disgust. All these Geoff had seen brought to bear on various subjects quite often enough to rate them at their exact value; and it was, therefore, with genuine pleasure that he found them conspicuous by their absence on the occasion of his mother's first visit to Elm Lodge.

For although Geoff was not particularly apt as a student of human nature,—his want of self-confidence, and the quiet life he had pursued, being great obstacles to any such study,—he must, nevertheless, have had something of the faculty

originally implanted in him, inasmuch as he had contrived completely, and almost without knowing it himself, to make himself master of the key to the characters of the two people with whom his life had been passed. It was this knowledge of his mother that made him originally propose that the first meeting between her and Margaret should take place at Brompton, where he could take his wife over as a visitor. He thought that very likely any little latent jealousy which the old lady might feel by reason of her deposition, not merely from the foremost place in her son's affections, but from the head of his table and the rulership of his house,—and it is undeniable that with the very best women these latter items jar quite as unpleasantly as the former, — whatever little jealousy Mrs. Ludlow may have felt on these accounts would be heightened by the sight of the new house and furniture in which it had pleased Geoff to have his new divinity enshrined. There is a point at which the female nature rebels; and though Geoff neither knew, nor professed to know, much about female nature, he was perfectly certain

that as a young woman is naturally more likely to "take up with" another who is her inferior in personal attractions, so Mrs. Ludlow would undoubtedly be more likely to look favourably on a daughter-in-law whose *status*, artificially or otherwise, should not appear greater than her own. It was Margaret who dissuaded Geoff from his original intention, pitting against her husband's special acquaintance with his mother's foibles her ordinary woman's cleverness, which told her that, properly managed, the new house and furniture, and all their little luxury, could be utilised for, instead of against, them with the old lady, making her part and parcel of themselves, and speaking of all the surroundings as component parts of a common stock, in which with them she had a common interest. This scheme, talked over in a long desultory lovers' ramble over the green cliffs at Niton in the ever-lovely Isle of Wight, resulted in the letter requesting Mrs. Ludlow to superintend the furniture-people, of which mention has already been made, and in the meeting taking place at Elm Lodge, as just described.

This first successful stroke, which Geoff perhaps unduly appreciated (but any thing in which his mother was involved had great weight with him), originated by Margaret and carried out by her aid, had great effect on Geoffrey Ludlow, and brought the woman whom he had married before him in quite a new light. The phrase "the woman he had married" is purposely chosen, because the fact of having a wife, in its largest and most legitimate sense, had not yet dawned upon him. We read in works of fiction of how men weigh and balance before committing matrimony,—carefully calculate this recommendation, calmly dissect that defect; we have essay-writers, political economists, and others, who are good enough to explain these calculations, and to show us why it ought to be, and how it is to be done; but, spite of certain of my brother-fictionists and these last-named social teachers, I maintain that, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, a man who is a man, "with blood, bones, passion, marrow, feeling," as Byron says, marries a girl because he is smitten with the charms either of her person or her manner—

because there is something *simpatico,* as the Italians call it, between them—because he is "in love with her," as the good old English phrase runs; but without having paid any thing but the most cursory attention to her disposition and idiosyncrasy. Is it so, or is it not? Such a state of things leads, I am perfectly aware, to the acceptance of stone for bread and scorpions for fish; but it exists, hath existed, and will continue to exist. Brown now helplessly acknowledges Mrs. B.'s "devil of a temper;" but even if he had had proof positive of it, he would have laughed it away merrily enough that summer at Margate, when Mrs. B. was Emily Clark, and he was under the thrall of her black eyes. Jones suffers under his wife's "low fits," and Robinson under Mrs. Robinson's religion, which she takes very hot and strong, with a great deal of groaning and anathematising; but though these peculiarities of both ladies might have been learned "on application" to any of the various swains who had been rejected by them, no inquiry was ever made by the more fortunate men who took them honestly on trust,

and on account of their visible personal attractions. And though these instances seem drawn from a lower class of life, I contend that the axiom holds good in all states of society, save, of course, in the case of purely mercenary marriages, which, however, are by no means so common in occurrence, or at all events so fatal in their results, as many of our novel-writers wish us to believe.

It was undoubtedly the case with Geoffrey Ludlow. He was a man as free from gross passions, as unlikely to take a sudden caprice, or to give the reins to his will, as any of his kind. His intimates would as soon have thought of the bronze statue of Achilles "committing" itself as Geoff Ludlow; and yet it was for the dead-gold hair, the deep-violet eyes, and the pallid face, that he had married Margaret Dacre; and on her mental attributes he had not bestowed one single thought. He had not had much time, certainly; but however long his courtship might have been, I doubt whether he would have penetrated very far into the mysteries of her idiosyncrasy. He had a certain theory that she was "artistic;" a

word which, with him, took the place of "romantic" with other people, as opposed to "practical." Geoff hated "practical" people; perhaps because he had suffered from an over-dose of practicality in his own home. He would far sooner that his wife should *not* have been able to make pies and puddings, and cut-out baby-linen, than that she should have excelled in those notable domestic virtues. But none of these things had entered his head when he asked Margaret Dacre to join her lot with his,—save, perhaps, an undefined notion that no woman with such hair and such eyes could be so constituted. You would have looked in vain in Guinevere for the characteristics of Mrs. Rundell, or Miss Acton.

He had thought of her as his peerless beauty, as his realisation of a thousand waking dreams; and that for the time was enough. But when he found her entering into and giving shape and colour to his schemes, he regarded her with worship increased a hundredfold. Constitutionally inert and adverse to thinking and deciding for himself,—with a wholesome doubt, moreover, of

the efficacy of his own powers of judgment,—it was only the wide diversity of opinion which on nearly every subject existed between his mother and himself that had prevented him from long ago giving himself up entirely to the old lady's direction. But he now saw, readily enough, that he had found one whose guiding hand he could accept, who satisfied both his inclinations and his judgment; and he surrendered himself with more than resignation — with delight, to Margaret's control.

And she? It is paying her no great compliment to say that she was equal to the task; it is making no strong accusation against her to say that she had expected and accepted the position from the first. I am at a loss how exactly to set forth this woman's character as I feel it, fearful of enlarging on defects without showing something in their palliation—more fearful of omitting some mental ingredient which might serve to explain the twofold workings of her mind. When she left her home it was under the influence of love and pride; wild girlish adoration of the "swell:" the man with

the thick moustache, the white hands, the soft voice, the well-made boots; the man so different in every respect from any thing she had previously known; and girlish pride in enslaving one in social rank far beyond the railway-clerks, merchants' book-keepers, and Custom-House agents, who were marked down as game by her friends and compeers. The step once taken, she was a girl no more; her own natural hardihood came to her aid, and enabled her to hold her own wherever she went. The man her companion,—a man of society simply from mixing with society, but naturally sheepish and stupid,—was amazed at her wondrous calmness and self-possession under all sorts of circumstances. It was an odd sort of *camaraderie* in which they mixed, both at home and abroad; one where the *laissez-aller* spirit was always predominant, and where those who said and did as they liked were generally most appreciated; but there was a something in Margaret Dacre which compelled a kind of respect even from the wildest. Where she was, the drink never degenerated into an orgie; and though the

cancans and *doubles entendres* might ring round the room, all outward signs of decency were preserved. In the wild crew with which she was mixed she stood apart, sometimes riding the whirlwind with them, but always directing the storm; and while invariably showing herself the superior, so tempering her superiority as to gain the obedience and respect, if not the regard, of all those among whom she was thrown. How did this come about? Hear it in one sentence—that she was as cold as ice, and as heartless as a stone. She loved the man who had betrayed her with all the passion which had been vouchsafed to her. She loved him, as I have said, at first, from his difference to all her hitherto surroundings; then she loved him for having made her love him and yield to him. She had not sufficient mental power to analyse her own feelings; but she recognised that she had not much heart, was not easily moved; and therefore she gave extraordinary credit, which he did not deserve, to him who had had the power to turn her as he listed.

But still, on him, her whole powers of loving

stopped—spent, used-up. Her devotion to him—inexplicable to herself—was spaniel-like in its nature. She took his reproaches, his threats, at the last his desertion, and loved him still. During the time they were together she had temptation on every side; but not merely did she continue faithful, but her fidelity was never shaken even in thought. Although in that shady *demi-monde* there is a queer kind of honour-code extant among the Lovelaces and the Juans, far stricter than they think themselves called upon to exercise when out of their own territory, there are of course exceptions, who hold the temptation of their friend's mistress but little less *piquante* than the seduction of their friend's wife; but none of these had the smallest chance with Margaret. What in such circles is systematically known by the name of a *caprice* never entered her mind. Even at the last, when she found herself deserted, penniless, she knew that a word would restore her to a position equivalent, apparently, to that she had occupied; but she would not have spoken that word to have saved her from the death which she was so nearly meeting.

In those very jaws of death, from which she had just been rescued, a new feeling dawned upon her. As she lay back in the arm-chair in Flexor's parlour, dimly sounding in her ears, at first like the monotonous surging of the waves, afterwards shaping itself into words, but always calm and grave and kind, came Geoff's voice. She could scarcely make out what was said, but she knew what was meant from the modulation and the tone. Then, when Mr. Potts had gone to fetch Dr. Rollit, she knew that she was left alone with the owner of the voice, and she brought all her strength together to raise her eyelids and look at him. She saw the quiet earnest face, she marked the intense gaze, and she let her light fingers fall on the outstretched hand, and muttered her "Bless you!—saved me!" with a gratitude which was not merely an expression of grateful feeling for his rescuing her from death, but partook more of the cynic's definition of the word—a recognition of benefits to come.

It sprung up in her mind like a flame. It did more towards effecting her cure, even in the out-

set, than all the stimulants and nourishment which Dr. Rollit administered. It was with her while consciousness remained, and flashed across her the instant consciousness returned. A home, the chances of a home—nothing but that—somewhere, with walls, and a fire, and a roof to keep off the pelting of the bitter rain. Walls with pictures and a floor with carpets; not a workhouse, not such places as she had spent the night in on her weary desolate tramp; but such as she had been accustomed to. And some one to care for her—no low whisperings, and pressed hands, and averted glances, and flight; but a shoulder to rest her head against, a strong arm round her to save her from—O God!—those awful black pitiless streets. Rest, only rest,—that was her craving. Let her once more be restored to ordinary strength, and then let her rest until she died. Ah, had she not had more than the ordinary share of trouble and disquietude, and could not a haven be found for her at last? She recollected how, in the first flush of her wildness, she had pitied all her old companions soberly settling down in

life; and now how gladly would she change lots with them! Was it come? was the chance at hand? Had she drifted through the storm long enough, and was the sun now breaking through the clouds? She thought so, even as she lay nearer death than life, and through the shimmering of her eyelids caught a fleeting glimpse of Geoff Ludlow's face, and heard his voice as in a dream; she knew so after the second time of his calling on her in her convalescence; knew she might tell him the story of her life, which would only bind a man of his disposition more strongly to her; knew that such a feeling engendered in such a man at his time of life was deep and true and lasting, and that once taken to his heart, her position was secure for ever.

And what was her feeling for him who thus rose up out of the darkness, and was to give her all for which her soul had been pining? Love? Not one particle. She had no love left. She had not been by any means bounteously provided with that article at the outset, and all that she had she had expended on one person. Of love, of what

we know by love, of love as he himself understood it, she had not one particle for Geoffrey. But there was a feeling which she could hardly explain to herself. It would have been respect, respect for his noble heart, his thorough uprightness, and strict sense of honour; but this respect was diluted by an appreciation of his dubiety, his vacillation, his utter impotency of saying a harsh word or doing a harsh thing; and diluted in a way which invested the cold feeling of respect with a warmer hue, and rendered him, if less perfect, certainly more interesting in her eyes. Never, even for an instant, had she thought of him with love-passion; not when she gazed dreamily at him out of the voluptuous depths of her deep-violet eyes; not when, on that night when all had been arranged between them, she had lain on his breast in the steel-blue rays of the spring moon. She had—well, feigned it, if you like,—though she would scarcely avow that, deeming rather that she had accepted the devotion which he had offered her without repelling it. *Il y a toujours l'un qui baise, l'autre qui tend la*

joue. That axiom, unromantic, but true in most cases, was strictly fulfilled in the present instance. Margaret proffered no love, but accepted, if not willingly, at least with a thorough show of graciousness all that was proffered to her. And in the heartfelt worship of Geoffrey Ludlow there was something inexplicably attractive to her. Attractive, probably, because of its entire novelty and utter unselfishness. She could compare it with nothing she had ever seen or known. To her first lover there had been the attraction of enchaining the first love of a very young girl, the romance of stolen meetings and secret interviews, the enchantment of an elopement, which was looked upon as a great sin by those whom he scorned, and a great triumph by those whose applause he envied; the gratification of creating the jealousy of his compeers, and of being talked about as an example to be shunned by those whom he despised. He had the satisfaction of flaunting her beauty through the world, and of gaining that world's applause for his success in having made it succumb to him. But how was it with Geoffrey?

The very opposite, in every way. At the very best her early history must be shrouded in doubt and obscurity. If known it might act prejudicially against her husband with his patrons, and those on whom he was dependent for his livelihood. Even her beauty could not afford him much source of gratification, save to himself; he could seldom or never enjoy that reflected pleasure which a sensible man feels at the world's admiration of his wife; for had he not himself told her that their life would be of the quietest, and that they would mix with very few people?

No! if ever earnest, true, and unselfish love existed in the world, it was now, she felt, bestowed upon her. What in the depths of her despair she had faintly hoped for, had come to her with treble measure. Her course lay plain and straight before her. It was not a very brilliant course, but it was quiet and peaceful and safe. So away all thoughts of the past! drop the curtain on the feverish excitement, the wild dream of hectic pleasure! Shut it out; and with it the

dead dull heartache, the keen sense of wrong, the desperate struggle for bare life.

So Margaret dropped that curtain on her wedding-day, with the full intention of never raising it again.

CHAPTER III.

ANNIE.

Lord Caterham's suggestion that Annie Maurice should cultivate her drawing-talent was made after due reflection. He saw, with his usual quickness of perception, that the girl's life was fretting away within her; that the conventional round of duties which fell to her lot as his mother's companion was discharged honestly enough, but without interest or concern. He never knew why Lady Beauport wanted a companion. So long as he had powers of judging character, he had never known her have an intimate friend; and when, at the death of the old clergyman with whom Annie had so long been domesticated, it was proposed to receive her into the mansion at St. Barnabas Square, Lord Caterham had been struck with astonishment, and could not possibly

imagine what duties she would be called upon to fulfil. He heard that the lady henceforth to form a part of their establishment was young, and that mere fact was in itself a cause for wonder. There was no youth there, and it was a quality which was generally openly tabooed. Lady Beauport's woman was about fifty, a thorough mistress of her art, an artist in complexion before whom Madame Rachel might have bowed; a cunning and skilled labourer in all matters appertaining to the hair; a person whose anatomical knowledge exceeded that of many medical students, and who produced effects undreamt of by the most daring sculptors. There were no nephews or nieces to come on visits, to break up the usual solemnity reigning throughout the house with young voices and such laughter as is only heard in youth, to tempt the old people into a temporary forgetfulness of self, and into a remembrance of days when they had hopes and fears and human interests in matters passing around them. There were sons—yes! Caterham himself, who had never had one youthful thought or one youthful aspiration, whose

playmate had been the physician, whose toys the wheel-chair in which he sat and the irons by which his wrecked frame was supported, who had been precocious at six and a man at twelve; and Lionel—but though of the family, Lionel was not of the house; he never used to enter it when he could make any possible excuse; and long before his final disappearance his visits had been restricted to those occasions when he thought his father could be bled or his mother cajoled. What was a girl of two-and-twenty to do in such a household, Caterham asked; but got no answer. It had been Lady Beauport's plan, who knew that Lord Beauport had been in the habit of contributing a yearly something towards Miss Maurice's support; and she thought that it would be at least no extra expense to have the young woman in the house, where she might make herself useful with her needle, and could generally sit with Mrs. Parkins the housekeeper.

But Lord Beauport would not have this. Treated as a lady, as a member of his own family in his house, or properly provided for out of it, should

Annie Maurice be: my lady's companion, but my cousin always. No companionship with Mrs. Parkins, no set task or suggested assistance. Her own room, her invariable presence when the rest of the family meet together, if you please. Lady Beauport did not please at first; but Lord Beauport was firm, firm as George Brakespere used to be in the old days; and Lady Beauport succumbed with a good grace, and was glad of it ever after. For Annie Maurice not merely had the sweetest temper and the most winning ways,—not merely read in the softest voice, and had the taste to choose the most charming "bits," over which Lady Beauport would hum first with approval and then with sleep,—not merely played and sung delightfully, without ever being hoarse or disinclined,—not merely could ride with her back to the horses, and dress for the Park exactly as Lady Beauport wished—neither dowdy nor swell,—but she brought old-fashioned receipts for quaint country dishes with which she won Mrs. Parkins's heart, and she taught Hodgson, Lady Beauport's maid, a new way of *gauffreing* which

broke down all that Abigail's icy spleen. Her bright eyes, her white teeth, her sunny smile, did all the rest for her throughout the household: the big footmen moved more quickly for her than for their mistress; the coachman, with whom she must have interchanged confidential communications, told the groom she "knowed the p'ints of an 'oss as well as he did—spotted them wind-galls in Jack's off 'ind leg, and says, 'a cold-water bandage for them,' she says;" the women-servants, more likely than any of the others to take offence, were won by the silence of her bell and her independence of toilette assistance.

Lord Caterham saw all this, and understood her popularity; but he saw too that with it all Annie Maurice was any thing but happy. Reiteration of conventionality,—the reception of the callers and the paying of the calls, the morning concerts and afternoon botanical promenades, the occasional Opera-goings, and the set dinner-parties at home,—these weighed heavily on her. She felt that her life was artificial, that she had nothing in common with the people with whom

it was passed, save when she escaped to Lord Caterham's room. He was at least natural; she need talk or act no conventionality with him; might read, or work, or chat with him as she liked. But she wanted some purpose in life— that Caterham saw, and saw almost with horror; for that purpose might tend to take her away; and if she left him, he felt as though the only bright portion of his life would leave him too.

Yes; he had begun to acknowledge this to himself. He had fought against the idea, tried to laugh it off, but it had always recurred to him. For the first time in his life, he had moments of happy expectancy of an interview that was to come, hours of happy reflection over an interview that was past. Of course the Carry-Chesterton times came up in his mind; but these were very different. Then he was in a wild state of excitement and tremor, of flushed cheeks and beating heart and trembling lips; he thrilled at the sound of her voice; his blood, usually so calm, coursed through his veins at the touch of her hand; his passion was a delirium as alarming

as it was intoxicating. The love of to-day had nothing in common with that bygone time. There was no similarity between Carry Chesterton's dash and *aplomb* and Annie Maurice's quiet domestic ways. The one scorched him with a glance; the other soothed him with a word. How sweet it was to lie back in his chair with half-shut eyes, as in a dream, and watch her moving quietly about, setting every thing in order, putting fresh flowers in his vases, dusting his writing-table, laughingly upbraiding the absent Algy Barford, and taxing him with the delinquency of a half-smoked cigar on the mantelpiece, and a pile of cigar-ash on the carpet. Then he would bid her finish her house-work, and she would wheel his chair to the table and read the newspapers to him, and listen to his quaint, shrewd, generally sarcastic comments on all she read. And he would sit, listening to the music of her voice, looking at the quiet charms of her simply-banded glossy dark-brown hair, at the play of feature illustrating every thing she read. It was a brother's love he told himself at

first, and fully believed it; a brother's love for a favourite sister. He thought so until he pictured to himself her departure to some friends or other, until he imagined the house without her, himself without her, and—and she with some one else. And then Lord Caterham confessed to himself that he loved Annie Maurice with all his soul, and simultaneously swore that by no act or word of his should she or any one else ever know it.

The Carry-Chesterton love-fever had been so sharp in its symptoms, and so prostrating in its results, that this second attack fell with comparative mildness on the sufferer. He had no night-watches now, no long feverish tossings to and fro waiting for the daylight, no wild remembrance of parting words and farewell hand-clasps. She was there; her "good-night" had rung out sweetly and steadily without a break in the situation; her sweet smile had lit up her face; her last words had been of some projected reading or work for the morrow. It was all friend and friend or brother and sister to every one but him. The very first night after

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Miss Chesterton had been presented to Lady Beauport, the latter, seeing with a woman's quickness the position of affairs, had spoken of the young lady from Homersham as "that dreadful person," "that terribly-forward young woman," and thereby goaded Lord Caterham into worse love-madness. Now both father and mother were perpetually congratulating themselves and him on having found some one who seemed to be able to enter into and appreciate their eldest son's "odd ways." This immunity from parental worry and supervision was pleasant, doubtless; but did it not prove that to eyes that were not blinded by love-passion there was nothing in Miss Maurice's regard for her cousin more than was compatible with cousinly affection, and with pity for one so circumstanced? So Lord Caterham had it; and who shall say that his extreme sensitiveness had deceived him?

It was the height of the London season, and Lady Beauport was fairly in the whirl. So was Annie Maurice, whose position was already as clearly defined amongst the set as if she had been

duly ticketed with birth, parentage, education, and present employment. Hitherto her experience had decidedly been pleasant, and she had found that all the companion-life, as set forth in fashionable novels, had been ridiculously exaggerated. From no one had she received any thing approaching a slight, any thing approaching an insult. The great ladies mostly ignored her, though some made a point of special politeness; the men received her as a gentlewoman, with whom flirtation might be possible on an emergency, though unremunerative as a rule. Her perpetual attendance on Lady Beauport had prevented her seeing as much as usual of Lord Caterham; and it was with a sense of relief that she found a morning at her disposal, and sent Stephens to intimate her coming to his master.

She found him as usual, sitting listlessly in his wheel-chair, the newspaper folded ready to his hand, but unfolded and unread. He looked up, and smiled as she entered the room, and said: "At last, Annie, at last! Ah, I knew such a nice little girl who came here from Ricksbo-

rough, and lightened my solitary hours; but we've had a fashionable lady here lately, who is always at concerts or operas, or eating ices at Gunter's, or crushing into horticultural marquees, or—"

"Arthur, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! You know, however, I won't stoop to argue with you, sir. I'll only say that the little girl from Ricksborough has come back again, and that the fashionable lady has got a holiday and gone away."

"That's good; but I say, just stand in the light, Annie."

"Well, what's the matter now?"

"What has the little girl from Ricksborough done with all her colour? Where's the brightness of her eyes?"

"Ah, you don't expect every thing at once, do you, sir? Her natural colour has gone; but she has ordered a box from Bond Street; and as for the brightness of her eyes—"

"O, there's enough left; there is indeed, especially when she fires up in that way. But

you're not looking well, Annie. I'm afraid my lady's doing too much with you."

"She's very kind, and wishes me to be always with her."

"Yes; but she forgets that the vicarage of Ricksborough was scarcely good training-ground for the races in which she has entered you, however kindly you take to the running." He paused a minute as he caught Annie's upturned gaze, and said: "I don't mean that, dear Annie. I know well enough you hate it all; and I was only trying to put the best face on the matter. What else can I do?"

"I know that, Arthur; nor is it Lady Beauport's fault that she does not exactly comprehend how a series of gaieties can be any thing but agreeable to a country-bred young woman. There are hundreds of girls who would give any thing to be 'brought out' under such chaperonage and in such a manner."

"You are very sweet and good to say so, Annie, and to look at it in that light, but I would give any thing to get you more time to yourself."

"That proves more plainly than any thing, Arthur, that you don't consider me one of the aristocracy; for their greatest object in life appears to me to prevent their having any time to themselves."

"Miss Maurice," said Lord Caterham with an assumption of gravity, "these sentiments are really horrible. I thought I missed my *Mill on Liberty* from the bookshelves. I am afraid, madame, you have been studying the doctrines of a man who has had the frightful audacity to think for himself."

"No, indeed, Arthur; nothing of the sort. I did take down the book—though of course you had never missed it; but it seemed a dreary old thing, and so I put it back again. No, I haven't a radical thought or feeling in me—except sometimes."

"And when is the malignant influence at work, pray?"

"When I see those footmen dressed up in that ridiculous costume, with powder in their heads, I confess then to being struck with won-

der at a society which permits such monstrosity, and degrades its fellow-creatures to such a level."

"O, for a stump!" cried Caterham, shaking in his chair and with the tears running down his cheeks; "this display of virtuous indignation is quite a new and hitherto undiscovered feature in the little girl from Ricksborough; though of course you are quite wrong in your logic. Your fault should be found with the creatures who permit themselves to be so reduced. That 'dreary old thing,' Mr. Mill, would tell you that if the supply ceased, the demand would cease likewise. But don't let us talk about politics, for heaven's sake, even in fun. Let us revert to our original topic."

"What was that?"

"What was that! Why you, of course! Don't you recollect that we decided that you should have some drawing-lessons?"

"I recollect you were good enough to—"

"Annie! Annie! I thought it was fully understood that my goodness was a tabooed sub-

ject. No; you remember we arranged, on the private-view day of the Exhibition, with that man who had those two capital pictures—what's his name?—Ludlow, to give you some lessons."

"Yes; but Mr. Ludlow himself told us that he could not come for some little time; he was going out of town."

"I've had a letter from him this morning, explaining the continuance of his absence. What do you think is the reason?"

"He was knocked up, and wanted rest?"

"N-no; apparently not."

"He's not ill? O, Arthur, he's not ill?"

"Not in the least, Annie,—there's not the least occasion for you to manifest any uneasiness." Lord Caterham's voice was becoming very hard and his face very rigid. "Mr. Ludlow's return to town was delayed in order that he might enjoy the pleasures of his honeymoon in the Isle of Wight."

"His what?"

"His honeymoon; he informs me that he is just married."

"Married? Geoff married? Who to? What a very extraordinary thing! Who is he married to?"

"He has not reposed sufficient confidence in me to acquaint me with the lady's name, probably guessing rightly that I was not in the least curious upon the point, and that to know it would not have afforded me the slightest satisfaction."

"No, of course not; how very odd!" That was all Annie Maurice said, her chin resting on her hand, her eyes looking straight before her.

"What is very odd?" said Caterham, in a harsh voice. "That Mr. Ludlow should get married? Upon my honour I can't see the eccentricity. It is not, surely, his extreme youth that should provoke astonishment, nor his advanced age, for the matter of that. He's not endowed with more wisdom than most of us to prevent his making a fool of himself. What there is odd about the fact of his marriage I cannot understand."

"No, Arthur," said Annie, very quietly, ut-

terly ignoring the querulous tone of Caterham's remarks; "very likely you can't understand it, because Mr. Ludlow is a stranger to you, and you judge him as you would any other stranger. But if you'd known him in the old days when he used to come up to us at Willesden, and papa was always teasing him about being in love with the French teacher at Minerva House, a tall old lady with a moustache; or with the vicar's daughter, a sandy-haired girl in spectacles; and then poor papa would laugh,—O, how he would laugh!—and declare that Mr. Ludlow would be a bachelor to the end of his days. And now he's married, you say? How very, very strange!"

If Lord Caterham had been going to make any further unpleasant remark, he checked himself abruptly, and looking into Annie's up-turned pondering face, said, in his usual tone,

"Well, married or not married, he won't throw us over; he will hold to his engagement with us. His letter tells me he will be back in town at the end of the week, and will then

settle times with us; so that we shall have our drawing-lessons, after all."

But Annie, evidently thoroughly preoccupied, only answered methodically, "Yes—of course—thank you—yes." So Lord Caterham was left to chew the cud of his own reflections, which, from the manner in which he frowned to himself, and sat blankly drumming with his fingers on the desk before him, was evidently no pleasant mental pabulum. So that he was not displeased when there came a sonorous tap at the door, to which, recognising it at once, he called out, "Come in!"

CHAPTER IV.

ALGY BARFORD'S NEWS.

It was the Honourable Algy Barford who opened the door, and came in with his usual light and airy swing, stopping the minute he saw a lady present to remove his hat, and to give an easy bow. He recognised Annie at once, and, as she and he were great allies, he went up to her and shook hands.

"Charmed to see you, Miss Maurice. This is delightful—give you my word! Come to see this dear old boy here—how are you, Caterham, my dear fellow?—and find you in his den, lighting it up like—like—like—I'm regularly basketed, by Jove! You know what you light it up like, Miss Maurice."

Annie laughed as she said, "O, of course I know, Mr. Barford; but I'm sorry to say the

illumination is about immediately to be extinguished, as I must run away. So good-bye; good-bye, Arthur. I shall see you to-morrow." And she waved her hand, and tripped lightly away.

"Gad, what a good-natured charming girl that is!" said Algy Barford, looking after her. "I always fancy that if ever I could have settled down—but I never could—impossible! I'm without exception the most horrible scoundrel that—what's the matter, Caterham, dear old boy? you seem very down this morning, floundered, by Jove, so far as flatness is concerned. What is it?"

"I—oh, I don't know, Algy; a little bored, perhaps, this morning—hipped, you know."

"Know! I should think I did. I'm up to my watch-guard myself—think I'll take a sherry peg, just to keep myself up. This is a dull world, sir; a very wearying orb. Gad, sometimes I think my cousin, poor Jack Hamilton, was right, after all."

"What did he say?" asked Caterham, not

caring a bit, but for the sake of keeping up the conversation.

"Say! well, not much; he wasn't a talker, poor Jack; but what he did say was to the purpose. He was a very lazy kind of bird, and frightfully easily bored; so one day he got up, and then he wrote a letter saying that he'd lived for thirty years, and that the trouble of dressing himself every morning and undressing himself every night was so infernal that he couldn't stand it any longer; and then he blew his brains out."

"Ah," said Lord Caterham; "he got tired of himself, you see; and when you once do that, there's nobody you get so tired of."

"I daresay, dear old boy, though it's a terrific notion. Can't say I'm tired of myself quite yet, though there are times when I have a very low opinion of myself, and think seriously of cutting myself the next time we meet. What's the news with you, my dear Caterham?"

"News! what should be the news with me, Algy? Shut up in this place, like a rat in a cage, scarcely seeing any one but the doctor."

"Couldn't see a better fellow for news, my dear old boy. Doctors were always the fellows for news,—and barbers!—Figaro hé and Figaro la, and all that infernal rubbish that people laugh at when Ronconi sings it, always makes me deuced melancholy, by Jove. Well, since you've no news for me, let me think what I heard at the Club. Deuced nice club we've got now; best we've ever had since that dear old Velvet Cushion was done up."

"What's it called?"

"The Pelham; nothing to do with the Newcastle people or any thing of that sort; called after some fellow who wrote a book about swells; or was the hero of a book about swells, or something. Deuced nice place, snug and cosy; a little overdone with Aldershot, perhaps, and, to a critical mind, there might be a thought too much Plunger; but I can stand the animal tolerably well."

"I know it; at least I've heard of it," said Caterham. "They play very high, don't they?"

"O, of course you've heard it, I forgot; dear old Lionel belonged to it. Play! n-no, I don't

think so. You can if you like, you know, of course. For instance, Lampeter — Lamb Lampeter they call him; he's such a mild-looking party — won two thousand of Westonhanger the night before last at *écarté*—two thousand pounds, sir, in crisp bank-notes! All fair and above board too. They had a corner table at first; but when Westonhanger was dropping his money and began doubling the stakes, Lampeter said, 'All right, my lord; I'm with you as far as you like to go; but when so much money's in question, it perhaps might be advisable to take one of the tables in the middle of the room, where any one can stand round and see the play.' They did, and Westonhanger's estate is worse by two thou'."

"As you say, that does not look at all as if they played there."

"What I meant was that I didn't think dear old Lionel ever dropped much there. I don't know, though; I rather think Gamson had him one night. Wonderful little fellow, Gamson!—tremendously good-looking boy! — temporary extra-clerk at two guineas a-week in the Check

and Counter-check Office; hasn't got another regular rap in the world besides his pay, and plays any stakes you like to name. Seems to keep luck in a tube, like you do scent, and squeezes it out whenever he wants it. I am not a playing man myself; but I don't fancy it's very hard to win at the Pelham. These Plungers and fellows up from the Camp, they always will play; and as they've had a very heavy dinner and a big drink afterwards, it stands to reason that any fellow with a clear head and a knowledge of the game can pick them up at once, without any sharp practice."

"Yes," said Lord Caterham, "it seems a very charming place. I suppose wheel-chairs are not admitted? How sorry I am! I should have so enjoyed mixing with the delightful society which you describe, Algy. And what news had Mr. Gamson and the other gentlemen?"

"Tell you what it is, Caterham, old boy, you've got a regular wire-drawing fit on to-day. Let's see; what news had I to tell you?—not from Gamson, of course, or any of those hairy Yahoos

from Aldershot, who are always tumbling about the place. O, I know! Dick Ffrench has just come up from Denne,—the next place, you know, to Eversfield, your old uncle Ampthill's house; and he says the old boy's frightfully ill—clear case of hooks, you know; and I thought it might be advisable that your people should know, in case any thing might be done towards working the testamentary oracle. The old gentleman used to be very spoony on Lionel, years ago, I think I've heard him say."

"Well, what then?"

"Gad, you catch a fellow up like the Snapping-Turtle, Caterham. I don't know what then; but I thought if the thing were properly put to him—if there was any body to go down to Eversfield and square it with old Ampthill, he might leave his money—and there's no end of it, I hear —or some of it at least, to poor old Lionel."

"And suppose he did. Do you think, Algy Barford, after what has happened, that Lionel Brakespere could show his face in town? Do you think that a man of Lionel's spirit could face-out

the cutting which he'd receive from every one?—and rightly too; I'm not denying that. I only ask you if you think he could do it?"

"My dear old Caterham, you are a perfect child!—coral and bells and blue sash, and all that sort of thing, by Jove! If Lionel came back at this instant, there are very few men who'd remember his escapade, unless he stood in their way; then, I grant you, they would bring it up as unpleasantly as they could. But if he were to appear in society as old Ampthill's heir, there's not a man in his old set that wouldn't welcome him; no, by George, not a woman of his acquaintance that wouldn't try and hook him for self or daughter, as the case might be."

"I'm sorry to hear it," was all Caterham said in reply.

What did Lord Caterham think of when his friend was gone? What effect had the communication about Mr. Ampthill's probable legacy had on him? But one thing crossed his mind. If Lionel returned free, prosperous, and happy, would he

not fall in love with Annie Maurice? His experience in such matters had been but limited; but judging by his own feelings, Lord Caterham could imagine nothing more likely.

CHAPTER V.

SETTLING DOWN.

It was not likely that a man of Geoffrey Ludlow's temperament would for long keep himself from falling into what was to be the ordinary tenor of his life, even had his newly-espoused wife been the most exacting of brides, and delighted in showing her power by keeping him in perpetual attendance upon her. It is almost needless to say that Margaret was guilty of no weakness of this kind. If the dread truth must be told, she took far too little interest in the life to which she had devoted herself to busy herself about it in detail. She had a general notion that her whole future was to be intensely respectable; and in the minds of all those persons with whom she had hitherto been associated, respectability meant dulness of the most appalling kind; meant two-

o'clock-shoulder-of-mutton-and-weak-Romford-ale dinner, five o'clock tea, knitting, prayers, and a glass of cold water before going to bed; meant district-visiting and tract-distributing, poke bonnets and limp skirts, a class on Sunday afternoons, and a visit to the Crystal Palace with the school-children on a summer's day. She did not think it would be quite as bad as this in her case; indeed, she had several times been amused—so far as it lay in her now to be amused—by hearing Geoffrey speak of himself, with a kind of elephantine liveliness, as a roisterer and a Bohemian. But she was perfectly prepared to accept whatever happened; and when Geoff told her, the day after his mother's visit, that he must begin work again and go on as usual, she took it as a matter of course.

So Geoff arranged his new studio, and found out his best light, and got his easel into position; and Flexor arrived with the lay-figure which had been passing its vacation in Little Flotsam Street; and the great model recognised Mrs. Geoffrey Ludlow, who happened to look in, with a deferen-

tial bow, and, with what seemed best under the circumstances, a look of extreme astonishment, as though he had never seen her before, and expected to find quite a different person.

Gradually and one by one all the old accessories of Geoff's daily life seemed closing round him. A feeble ring, heard while he and his wife were at breakfast, would be followed by the servant's announcement of "the young person, sir, a-waitin' in the stujo;" and the young person—a model—would be found objurgating the distance from town, and yet appreciative of the beauty of the spot when arrived at.

And Mr. Stompff had come; of course he had. No sooner did he get Geoff's letter announcing his return than he put himself into a hansom cab, and went up to Elm Lodge. For Mr. Stompff was a man of business. His weak point was, that he judged other men by his own standard; and knowing perfectly well that if any other man had had the success which Geoffrey Ludlow had achieved that year, he (Stompff) would have worked heaven and earth to get him

into his clutches, he fancied that Caniche, and all the other dealers, would be equally voracious, and that the best thing he could do would be to strike the iron while it was hot, and secure Ludlow for himself. He thought too that this was rather a good opportunity for such a proceeding, as Ludlow's exchequer was likely to be low, and he could the more easily be won over. So the hansom made its way to Elm Lodge; and its fare, under the title of "a strange gentleman, sir!" was ushered into Geoff's studio.

"Well, and how are you, Ludlow? What did she say, 'a strange gentleman'? Yes, Mary, my love! I am a strange gentleman, as you'll find out before I've done with you." Mr. Stompff laid his finger to his nose, and winked with exquisite facetiousness. "Well, and how are you? safe and sound, and all the rest of it? And how's Mrs. L.? Must introduce me before I go. And what are you about now, eh? What's this?"

He stopped before the canvas on the easel, and began examining it attentively.

"That's nothing!" said Geoffrey; "merely

an outline of a notion I had of the Esplanade at Brighton. I don't think it would make a bad subject. You see, here I get the invalids in Bath-chairs, the regular London swells promenading it, the boatmen; the Indian-Mutiny man, with his bandaged foot and his arm in a sling and his big beard; some excursionists with their baskets and bottles; some Jews, and—"

"Capital! nothing could be better! Hits the taste of the day, my boy; shoots folly, and no flies, as the man said. That's your ticket! Any body else seen that?"

"Well, literally not a soul. It's only just begun, and no one has been here since I returned."

"That's all right! Now what's the figure? You're going to open your mouth, I know; you fellows always do when you've made a little success."

"Well, you see," began old Geoff, in his usual hesitating diffident manner, "it's a larger canvas than I've worked on hitherto, and there are a good many more figures, and—"

"Will five hundred suit you?"

"Ye-es! Five hundred would be a good price, for—"

"All right! shake hands on it! I'll give you five hundred for the copyright—right and away, mind!—sketch, picture, and right of engraving. We'll get it to some winter-gallery, and you'll have another ready for the Academy. Nothing like that, my boy! I know the world, and you don't. What the public likes, you give them as much of as you can. Don't you believe in over-stocking the market with Ludlows; that's all stuff! Let 'em have the Ludlows while they want 'em. In a year or two they'll fight like devils to get a Jones or a Robinson, and wonder how the deuce any body could have spent their money on such a dauber as Ludlow. Don't you be offended, my boy; I'm only speakin' the truth. I buy you because the public wants you; and I turn an honest penny in sellin' you again; not that I'm any peculiar nuts on you myself, either one way or t'other. Come, let's wet this bargain, Ludlow, my boy; some of that dry sherry you pulled out when I saw you last at Brompton, eh?"

Geoffrey rang the bell; the sherry was produced, and Mr. Stompff enjoyed it with great gusto.

"Very neat glass of sherry as ever I drank. Well, Ludlow, success to our bargain! Give it a good name, mind; that's half the battle; and, I say, I wouldn't do too much about the Jews, eh? You know what I mean; none of that d—d nose-trick, you know. There's first-rate customers among the Jews, though they know more about pictures than most people, and won't be palmed off like your Manchester coves; but when they do like a thing, they will have it; and though they always insist upon discount, yet even then, with the price one asks for a picture, it pays. Well, you'll be able to finish that and two others —O, how do you do, mum?"

This last to Margaret, who, not knowing that her husband had any one with him, was entering the studio. She bowed, and was about to withdraw; but Geoff called her back, and presented Mr. Stompff to her.

"Very glad to make your acquaintance, mam," said that worthy, seizing her hand;

"heard of you often, and recognise the picture of Scyllum and Something in an instant. Enjoyed yourself in the country, I 'ope. That's all right. But nothing like London; that's the place to pick up the dibs. I've been telling our friend here he must stick to it, now he's a wife to provide for; for we know what's what, don't we, Mrs. Ludlow? Three pictures a year, my boy, and good-sized 'uns too; no small canvases: that's what we must have out of you."

Geoffrey laughed as he said, "Well, no; not quite so much as that. Recollect, I intend to take my wife out occasionally; and besides, I've promised to give some drawing-lessons."

"What!" shrieked Mr. Stompff; "drawing-lessons! a man in your position give drawing-lessons! I never heard such madness! You musn't do that, Ludlow."

The words were spoken so decidedly that Margaret bit her lips, and turned to look at her husband, whose face flushed a deep red, and whose voice stuttered tremendously as he gasped out, "B-but I shall! D-don't you say 'must,'

please, to me, Mr. Stompff; because I don't like it; and I don't know what the d-deuce you mean by using such a word!"

Mr. Stompff glanced at Margaret, whose face expressed the deepest disgust; so, clearly perceiving the mistake he had made, he said, "Well, of course I only spoke as a friend; and when one does that he needn't be in much doubt as to his reward. When I said 'must,' which seems to have riled you so, Ludlow, I said it for your own sake. However, you and I sha'n't fall out about that. Don't you give your pictures to any one else, and we shall keep square enough. Where are you going to give drawing-lessons, if one may be bold enough to ask?"

"In St. Barnabas Square, to a young lady, a very old friend of mine, and a *protégée* of Lord Caterham's," said Geoffrey, whose momentary ire had died out.

"O, Lord Caterham's! that queer little deformed chap. Good little fellow, too, they say he is; sharp, and all that kind of thing. Well, there's no harm in that. I thought you were

going on the philanthropic dodge — to schools and working-men, and that lay. There's one rule in life,—you never lose any thing by being civil to a bigwig; and this little chap, I daresay, has influence in his way. By the way, you might ask him to give a look in at my gallery, if he's passing by. Never does any harm, that kind of thing. Well, I can't stay here all day. Men of business must always be pushing on, Mrs. Ludlow. Good day to you; and, I say, when —hem! there's any thing to renounce the world, the flesh, and the—hey, you understand? any body wanted to promise and vow, you know,— I'm ready; send for me. I've got my eye on a silver mug already. Good-bye, Ludlow; see you next week. Three before next May, recollect, and all for me. Ta-ta!" and Mr. Stompff stepped into his cab, and drove off, kissing his fat pudgy little hands, with a great belief in Geoffrey Ludlow and a holy horror of his wife.

In the course of the next few days Geoffrey

wrote to Lord Caterham, telling him that he was quite ready to commence Miss Maurice's instruction; and shortly afterwards received an answer naming a day for the lessons to commence. On arriving at the house Geoff was shown into Lord Caterham's room, and there found Annie waiting to receive him. Geoff advanced, and shook hands warmly; but he thought Miss Maurice's manner was a little more reserved than on the last occasion of their meeting.

"Lord Caterham bade me make his excuses to you, Mr. Ludlow," said she. "He hopes to see you before you go; but he is not very well just now, and does not leave his room till later in the day."

Geoff was a little hurt at the "Mr. Ludlow." Like all shy men, he was absurdly sensitive; and at once thought that he saw in this mode of address a desire on Annie's part to show him his position as drawing-master. So he merely said he was "sorry for the cause of Lord Caterham's absence;" and they proceeded at once to work.

But the ice on either side very soon melted away. Geoff had brought with him an old sketch-book, filled with scraps of landscape and figures, quaint *bizarre* caricatures, and little bits of every-day life, all drawn at Willesden Priory or in its neighbourhood, all having some little history of their own appealing to Annie's love of those old days and that happy home. And as she looked over them, she began to talk about the old times; and very speedily it was, "O, Geoff, don't you remember?" and "O, Geoff, will you ever for-get?" and so on; and they went on sketching and talking until, to Annie at least, the present and the intervening time faded away, and she was again the petted little romp, and he was dear old Geoff, her best playmate, her earliest friend, whom she used to drive round the gravel-paths in her skipping-rope harness, and whose great shock head of hair used to cause her such infinite won-der and amusement.

As she sat watching him bending over the drawing, she remembered with what anxiety she used to await his coming at the Priory, and with

what perfect good-humour he bore all her childish whims and vagaries. She remembered how he had always been her champion when her papa had been *brusque* or angry with her, saying, "Fairy was too small to be scolded;" how when just before that horrible bankruptcy took place and all the household were busy with their own cares, she, suffering under some little childish illness, was nursed by Geoff, then staying in the house with a vague idea of being able to help Mr. Maurice in his trouble; how he carried her in his arms to and fro, to and fro, during the whole of one long night, and hushed her to sleep with the soft tenderness of a woman. She had thought of him often and often during her life at Ricksborough Vicarage, always with the same feelings of clinging regard and perfect trust; and now she had found him. Well, no, not him exactly; she doubted very much whether Mr. Ludlow the rising artist was the same as the "dear old Geoff" of the Willesden-Priory days. There was—and then, as she was thinking all this, Geoff raised his eyes from the drawing, and smiled his dear old

happy smile, and put his pencil between his teeth, and slowly rubbed his hands while he looked over his sketch, so exactly as he used to do fifteen years before, that she felt more than ever annoyed at that news which Arthur had told her a few days ago about Mr. Ludlow being married.

Yes, it was annoyance she felt! there was no other word for it. In the old days he had belonged entirely to her, and why should he not now? Her papa had always said that it was impossible Geoff could ever be any thing but an old bachelor, and an old bachelor he should have remained. What a ridiculous thing for a man at his time of life to import a new element into it by marriage! It would have been so pleasant to have had him then, just in the old way; to have talked to him and teased him, and looked up to him just as she used to do, and now—O, no! it could not be the same! no married man is ever the same with the friends of his bachelorhood, especially female friends, as he was before. And Mrs. Ludlow, what was she like? what could have induced Geoff to marry her? While Geoff's head

was bent over the drawing, Annie revolved all this rapidly in her mind, and came to the conclusion that it must have been for money that Geoff plunged into matrimony, and that Mrs. Ludlow was either a widow with a comfortable jointure, in which case Annie pictured her to herself as short, stout, and red-faced, with black hair in bands and a perpetual black-silk dress; or a small heiress of uncertain age, thin, with hollow cheeks and a pointed nose, ringlets of dust-coloured hair, a pinched waist, and a soured temper. And to think of Geoff's going and throwing away the rest of his life on a person of this sort, when he might have been so happy in his old bachelor way!

The more she thought of this the more she hated it. Why had he not announced to them that he was going to be married, when she first met him after that long lapse of years? To be sure, the rooms at the Royal Academy were scarcely the place in which to enter on such a matter; but then—who could she be? what was she like? It was so long since Geoff had been

intimate with any one; she knew that of course his range of acquaintance might have been changed a hundred times and she not know one of them. How very strange that he did not say any thing about it now! He had been here an hour sketching and pottering about, and yet had not breathed a word about it. O, she would soon settle that!

So the next time Geoff looked up from his sketch, she said to him: "Are you longing to be gone, Geoffrey? Getting fearfully bored? Is a horrible *heimweh* settling down upon your soul? I suppose under the circumstances it ought to be, if it isn't."

"Under what circumstances, Annie? I'm not bored a bit, nor longing to be gone. What makes you think so?"

"Only my knowledge of a fact which I've learned, though not from you—your marriage, Geoffrey."

"Not from me! Pardon me, Annie; I begged Lord Caterham, to whom I announced it, specially to name it to you. And, if you must

know, little child, I wondered you had said nothing to me about it."

He looked at her earnestly as he said this; and there was a dash of disappointment in his honest eyes.

"I'm so sorry, Geoff—so sorry! But I didn't understand it so; really I didn't," said Annie, already half-penitent. "Lord Caterham told me of the fact, but as from himself, not from you; and—and I thought it odd that, considering all our old intimacy, you hadn't—"

"Odd! why, God bless my soul! Annie, you don't think that I shouldn't; but, you see, it was all so—At all events, I'm certain I told Lord Caterham to tell you."

Geoff was in a fix here. His best chance of repudiating the idea that he had wilfully neglected informing Annie of his intended marriage was the true reason, that the marriage itself was, up to within the shortest time of its fulfilment, so unlooked for; but this would throw a kind of slur on his wife; at all events, would prompt inquiries; so he got through it as best he could with the stuttering excuses above recorded.

They seemed to avail with Annie Maurice; for she only said, "O, yes; I daresay it was some bungle of yours. You always used to make the most horrible mistakes, Geoff, I've heard poor papa say a thousand times, and get out of it in the lamest manner." Then, after a moment, she said, "You must introduce me to your wife, Geoffrey;" and, almost against her inclination, added, "What is she like?"

"Introduce you, little child? Why, of course I will, and tell her how long I have known you, and how you used to sit on my knee, and be my little pet," said old Geoff, in a transport of delight. "O, I think you'll like her, Annie. She is—yes, I may say so—she is very beautiful, and—and very quiet and good."

Geoff's ignorance of the world is painfully manifested in this speech. No woman could possibly be pleased to hear of her husband having been in the habit of having any little pet on his knee; and in advancing her being "very beautiful" as a reason for liking his wife, Geoff showed innocence which was absolutely refreshing.

Very beautiful! Was that mere conjugal blindness or real fact? Taken in conjunction with "very quiet and good," it looked like the former; but then where beauty was concerned Geoff had always been a stern judge; and it was scarcely likely that he would suffer his judgment, founded on the strictest abstract principles, to be warped by any whim or fancy. Very beautiful! —the quietude and goodness scarcely came into account,—very beautiful!

"O, yes; I must come and see Mrs. Ludlow, please. You will name a day before you go?"

"Name a day! What for, Annie?"

Lord Caterham was the speaker, sitting in his chair, and being wheeled in from his bedroom by Stephens. His tone was a little harsh; his temper a little sharp. He had all along determined that Annie and Geoff should not be left alone together on the occasion of her first lesson. But *l'homme propose et Dieu dispose;* and Caterham had been unable to raise his head from his pillow, with one of those fearful neuralgic headaches which occasionally affected him.

"What for! Why, to be introduced to Mrs. Ludlow! By the way, you seem to have left your eyes in the other room, Arthur. You have not seen Mr. Ludlow before, have you?"

"I beg Mr. Ludlow a thousand pardons!" said Caterham, who had forgotten the announcement of Geoffrey's marriage, and who hailed the recalling of the past with intense gratification. "I'm delighted to see you, Mr. Ludlow; and very grateful to you for coming to fill up so agreeably some of our young lady's blank time. If I thought you were a conventional man, I should make you a pretty conventional speech of gratulation on your marriage; but as I'm sure you're something much better, I leave that to be inferred."

"You are very good," said Geoff. "Annie was just saying that I should introduce my wife to her, and—"

"Of course, of course!" said Caterham, a little dashed by the familiarity of the "Annie." "I hope to see Mrs. Ludlow here; not merely as a visitor to a wretched bachelor like myself; but I'm sure my mother would be very pleased

to welcome her, and will, if you please, do herself the honour of calling on Mrs. Ludlow."

"Thank you, Arthur; you are very kind, and I appreciate it," said Annie, in a low voice, crossing to his chair; "but my going will be a different thing; I mean, as an old friend of Geoft's, *I* may go and see his wife."

An old friend of Geoff's! Still the same bond between them, in which he had no part—an intimacy with which he had nothing to do.

"Of course," said he; "nothing could be more natural."

"Little Annie coming to be introduced to Margaret!" thought Geoff, as he walked homeward, the lesson over. This, then, was to be Margaret's first introduction to his old friend. Not much fear of their not getting on together. And yet, on reflection, Geoff was not so sure of that, after all.

CHAPTER VI.

AT HOME.

The people of Lowbar, lusty citizens with suburban residences — lawyers, proctors, and merchants, all warm people in money matters—did not think much of the advent into their midst of a man following an unrecognised profession, which had no ledger-and-day-book responsibility, employed no clerks, and ministered to no absolute want. It was not the first time indeed that they had heard of an artist being encamped among them; for in the summer several brethren of the brush were tempted to make a temporary sojourn in the immediate vicinity of the broad meadows and suburban prettinesses. But these were mere birds of passage, who took lodgings over some shop in the High Street, and who were never seen save by marauding schoolboys or wandering

lovers, who would come suddenly upon a bearded man smoking a pipe, and sketching away under the shade of a big white umbrella. To wear a beard and, in addition to that enormity, to smoke a pipe were in themselves sufficient, in the eyes of the worthy inhabitants of Lowbar, to prove that a man was on the high-road to destruction; but they consoled themselves with the reflection that the evil-doer was but a sojourner amongst them. Now, however, had arrived a man in the person of Geoffrey Ludlow, who not merely wore a beard and smoked a pipe, but further flew in the face of all decently-constituted society by having a beautiful wife. And this man had not come into lodgings, but had regularly established himself in poor Mrs. Pierce's house, which he had had all done up and painted and papered and furnished in a manner—so at least Mr. Brandram the doctor said—that might be described as gorgeous.

Now, as the pretty suburb of Lowbar is still a good score of years behind the world, its inhabitants could not understand this at all, and the

majority of them were rather scandalised than otherwise, when they found that the vicar and his wife had called on the new-comers. Mr. Brandram the doctor had called too; but that was natural. He was a pushing man was Brandram, and a worldly man, so unlike Priestley, the other doctor, who was a retiring gentleman. So at least said Priestley's friends and Brandram's enemies. Brandram was a little man of between fifty and sixty, neat, and a little horsy in his dress, cheerful in his manner, fond of recommending good living, and fond of taking his own prescription. He was a little "fast" for Lowbar, going to the theatre once or twice in the year, and insisting upon having novels for the Book-Society; whereas Priestley's greatest dissipation was attending a "humorous lecture" at the Mechanics' Institute, and his lightest reading a book of Antipodean travel. Brandram called at Elm Lodge, of course, and saw both Geoff and Margaret, and talked of the Academy pictures,—which he had carefully got up from the catalogue and the newspaper-notices, —and on going away, left Mrs. Brandram's card.

For three weeks afterwards, that visit supplied the doctor with interesting discourse for his patients: he described all the alterations which had been made in the house since Mrs. Pierce's death; he knew the patterns of the carpets, the colours of the curtains, the style of the furniture. Finally, he pronounced upon the new-comers; described Geoff as a healthy man of a sanguineous temperament, not much cut out for the Lowbar folk; and his wife as a beautiful woman, but lymphatic.

These last were scarcely the details which the Lowbar folk wanted to know. They wanted to know all about the *ménage;* in what style the new-comers lived; whether they kept much or any company; whether they agreed well together. This last was a point of special curiosity; for, in common with numberless other worthy, commonplace, stupid people, the Lowbar folk imagined that the private lives of "odd persons"—under which heading they included all professors of literature and art of any kind—were passed in dissipation and wrangling. How the information was to be obtained was the great point, for they knew that

nothing would be extracted from the vicar, even if he had been brimful of remarks upon his new parishioners, which, indeed, he was not, as they neither of them happened to be at home when he called. It would be something to be well assured about their personal appearance, especially *her* personal appearance; to see whether there were really any grounds for this boast of beauty which Dr. Brandram went talking about in such a ridiculous way. The church was the first happy hunting-ground pitched upon; and during the first Sunday after Geoff's and Margaret's arrival the excitement during divine service was intense; the worshippers in the middle and side aisles, whose pews all faced the pulpit, and whose backs were consequently turned to the entrance-door, regarding with intense envy their friends whose pews confronted each other between the pulpit and the altar, and who, consequently, while chanting the responses or listening to the lesson, could steal furtive glances on every occasion of the door's opening, without outraging propriety. But when it was found that the new-comers did not attend either morning or evening

service,—and unquestionably a great many members of the congregation had their dinner of cold meat and salad (it was considered sinful in Lowbar to have hot dinners on Sunday) at an abnormally early hour for the purpose of attending evening service on the chance of seeing the new arrivals,—it was considered necessary to take more urgent measures; and so the little Misses Coverdale—two dried-up little chips of spinsters with corkscrew ringlets and black-lace mittens, who kept house for their brother, old Coverdale, the red-faced, white-headed proctor, Geoffrey's next-door neighbour—had quite a little gathering the next day, the supposed object of which was to take tea and walk in the garden, but the real object to peep furtively over the wall and try and catch a glimpse of her who was already sarcastically known as "Dr. Brandram's beauty." Some of the visitors, acquainted with the peculiarities of the garden, knowing what mound to stand on and what position to take up, were successful in catching a glimpse of the top of Margaret's hair—"all taken off her face like a schoolgirl's, and leaving her

cheeks as bare as bare," as they afterwards reported—as she wandered listlessly round the garden, stooping now and then to smell or gather a flower. One or two others were also rewarded by the sight of Geoffrey in his velvet painting-coat; among them, Letty Coverdale, who pronounced him a splendid man, and, O, so romantic-looking! for all ideas of matrimony had not yet left Miss Letty Coverdale, and the noun-substantive Man yet caused her heart to beat with an extra throb in her flat little chest; whereas Miss Matty Coverdale, who had a face like a horse, and who loudly boasted that she had never had an offer of marriage in her life, snorted out her wonder that Geoff did not wear a surtout like a Christian, and her belief that he'd be all the cleaner after a visit to Mr. Ball, who was the Lowbar barber.

But bit by bit the personal appearance of both of them grew sufficiently familiar to many of the inhabitants, some of the most courageous of whom had actually screwed themselves up to that pitch of boldness necessary for the accomplishment of calling and leaving cards on strangers pursuing a

profession unnamed in the *Directory*, and certainly not one of the three described in *Mangnall's Questions.* The calls were returned, and in some cases were succeeded by invitations to dinner. But Geoffrey cared little for these, and Margaret earnestly begged they might be declined. If she found her life insupportably dull and slow, this was not the kind of relief for which she prayed. A suburban dinner-party would be but a dull parody on what she had known; would give her trouble to dress for, without the smallest compensating amusement; would leave her at the mercy of stupid people, among whom she would probably be the only stranger, the only resource for staring eyes and questioning tongues. That they would have stared and questioned, there is little doubt; but they certainly intended hospitality. The "odd" feeling about the Ludlows prevalent on their first coming had worn off, and now the tide seemed setting the other way. Whether it was that the tradesmen's books were regularly paid, that the lights at Elm Lodge were seldom or never burning after eleven o'clock, that Geoffrey's name had been

seen in the *Times*, as having been present at a dinner given by Lord Everton, a very grand dinner, where he was the only untitled man among the company, or for whatever other reason, there was a decided disposition to be civil to them. No doubt Margaret's beauty had a great deal to do with it, so far as the men were concerned. Old Mr. Coverdale, who had been portentously respectable for half a century, but concerning whom there was a floating legend of "jolly dog-ism," in his youth, declared he had seen nothing like her since the Princess Charlotte; and Abbott, known as Captain Abbott, from having once been in the Commissariat, who always wore a chin-tip and a tightly-buttoned blue frock-coat and pipe-clayed buckskin gloves, made an especial point of walking past Elm Lodge every afternoon, and bestowing on Margaret, whenever he saw her, a peculiar leer which had done frightful execution amongst the nursemaids of Islington. Mrs. Abbott, a mild meek little woman, who practised potichomanie, delcomanie, the art of making wax-flowers, any thing whereby to make money to pay the trades-

people and supply varnish for her husband's boots and pocket-money for his *menus plaisirs*, was not, it is needless to say, informed of these vagaries on the captain's part.

They were discussed every where: at the Ladies' Clothing-Club, where one need scarcely say that the opinions concerning Margaret's beauty were a little less fervid in expression; and at the Gentlemen's Book-Society, where a proposition to invite Geoff to be of their number, started by the vicar and seconded by old Mr. Coverdale, was opposed by Mr. Bryant (of Bryant and Martin, coach-builders, Long Acre), on the ground that the first of the rules stated that this should be an association of gentlemen; and who could say what would be done next if artists was to be received? The discussion on this point waxed very warm, and during it Mr. Cremer the curate incurred Mr. Bryant's deepest hatred for calling out to him, on his again attempting to address the meeting, "Spoke, spoke!" which Mr. Bryant looked upon as a sneer at his trade, and remembered bitterly when the subscription was got up

in the parish for presenting Mr. Cremer with the silver teapot and two hundred sovereigns, with which (the teapot at least) he proceeded to the rectory of Steeple Bumstead, in a distant part of the country. They were discussed by the regulars in the nine-o'clock omnibus, most of whom, as they passed by Elm Lodge and saw Geoff through the big window just commencing to set his palette, pitied him for having to work at home, and rejoiced in their own freedom from the possibility of conjugal inroad; or, catching a glimpse of Margaret, poked each other in the ribs and told each other what a fine woman she was. They were discussed by the schoolboys going to school, who had a low opinion of art, and for the most part confined the remarks about Geoffrey to his having a "stunnin' beard," and about Margaret to her being a "regular carrots," the youthful taste being strongly anti-pre-Raffaellitic, and worshipping the raven tresses and straight noses so dear to the old romancers.

And while all these discussions and speculations were rife, the persons speculated on and dis-

cussed were leading their lives without a thought of what people were saying of them. Geoff knew that he was doing good work; he felt that intuitively as every man does feel it, quite as intuitively as when he is producing rubbish; and he knew it further from the not-too-laudatorily-inclined Mr. Stompff, who came up from time to time, and could not refuse his commendation to the progress of the pictures. And then Geoff was happy—at least, well, Margaret might have been a little more lively perhaps; but then—O, no; he was thoroughly happy! and Margaret—existed! The curtain had dropped on her wedding-day, and she had been groping in darkness ever since.

Time went on, as he does to all of us, whatever our appreciation of him may be, according to the mood we may happen to be in: swiftly to the happy and the old, slowly to the young and the wearied. There is that blessed compensation which pervades all human things, even in the flight of time. No matter how pleasant, how varied, how completely filled is the time of the

young, it hangs on them somehow; they do not feel it rush past them nor melt away, the hours swallowed up in days, the days in years, as do the elder people, who have no special excitement, no particular delight. The fact still remains that the young want time to fly, the old want him to crawl; and that, fulfilling the wishes of neither, he speeds on *æquo pede*, grumbled at by both.

The time went on. So Margaret knew by the rising and setting of the sun, by the usual meals, her own getting up and going to bed, and all the usual domestic routine. But by what else? Nothing. She had been married now nearly six months, and from that experience she thought she might deduce something like an epitome of her life. What was it? She had a husband who doated on her; who lavished on her comforts, superfluities, luxuries; who seemed never so happy as when toiling at his easel, and who brought the products of his work to her to dispose of as she pleased. A husband who up to that hour of her thought had never in the smallest degree failed to fulfil her earliest expectations of him,—generous

to a degree, kind-hearted, weak, and easily led. Weak! weak as water.—Yes, and O yes! What you like, my dear! What you think best, my child! That is for your decision, Margaret. I—I don't know; I scarcely like to give an opinion. Don't you think you had better settle it? I'll leave it all to you, please, dearest.—Good God! if he would only say *something*—as opposed to her ideas as possible, the more opposed the better—some assertion of self, some trumpet-note of argument, some sign of his having a will of his own, or at least an idea from which a will might spring. Here was the man who in his own art was working out the most admirable genius, showing that he had within him more of the divine afflatus than is given to nine hundred and ninety-nine in every thousand amongst us—a man who was rapidly lifting his name for the wonder and the envy of the best portion of the civilised world, incapable of saying "no" even to a proposition of hashed mutton for dinner, shirking the responsibility of a decision on the question of the proper place for a chair.

Indeed, I fear that, so far as I have stated, the sympathies of women will go against old Geoff, who must, I fancy, have been what they are in the habit of calling "very trying." You see he brought with him to the altar a big generous old heart, full of love and adoration of his intended wife, full of resolution, in his old blunt way, to stand by her through evil and good report, and to do his duty by her in all honour and affection. He was any thing but a self-reliant man; but he knew that his love was sterling coin, truly unalloyed; and he thought that it might be taken as compensation for numerous deficiencies, the existence of which he readily allowed. You see he discovered his power of loving simultaneously almost with his power of painting; and I think that this may perhaps account for a kind of feeling that, as the latter was accepted by the world, so would the former be by the person to whom it was addressed. When he sent out the picture which first attracted Mr. Stompff's attention, he had no idea that it was better than a score others which he had painted during the course of his

life; when he first saw Margaret Dacre, he could not tell that the instinctive admiration would lead to any thing more than the admiration which he had already silently paid to half-a-hundred pretty faces. But both had come to a successful issue; and he was only to paint his pictures with all the talent of his head and hand, and to love his wife with all the affection of his heart, to discharge his duty in life.

He did this; he worshipped her with all his heart. Whatever she did was right, whatever ought to have been discussed she was called upon to settle. They were very small affairs, as I have said,—of hashed mutton and jams, of the colour of a ribbon, or the fashion of a bonnet. Was there never to be any thing further than this? Was life to consist in her getting up and struggling through the day and going to bed at Elm Lodge? The short breakfast, when Geoff was evidently dying to be off into the painting-room; the long, long day — composed of servants' instruction, newspaper, lunch, sleep, little walk, toilette, dinner, utterly feeble conversation, yawns

and head-droppings, and finally bed. She had pictured to herself something quiet, tranquil, without excitement, without much change; but nothing like this.

Friends?—relations? O yes! old Mrs. Ludlow came to see her now and then; and she had been several times to Brompton. The old lady was very kind in her pottering stupid way, and her daughter Matilda was kind also, but at once gushing and prudish; so Margaret thought. And they both treated her as if she were a girl; the old lady perpetually haranguing her with good advice and feeble suggestion, and Matilda—who, of course, like all girls, had, it was perfectly evident, some silly love-affair on with some youth who had not as yet declared himself—wanting to make her half-confidences, and half-asking for advice, which she never intended to take. A girl? O yes, of course, she must play out that farce, and support that terribly vague story which old Geoff, pushed into a corner on a sudden, and without any one to help him at the instant, had fabricated concerning her parentage and belong-

ings. And she must listen to the old lady's praises of Geoff, and how she thought it not improbable, if things went on as they were going, that the happiest dream of her life would be fulfilled—that she should ride in her son's carriage. "It would be yours, of course, my dear; I know that well enough; but you'd let me ride in it sometimes, just for the honour and glory of the thing." And they talked like this to her: the old lady of the glory of a carriage; Matilda of some hawbuck wretch for whom she had a liking; —to her! who had sat on the box-seat of a drag a score of times, with half-a-score of the best men in England sitting behind her, all eager for a word or a smile.

She saw them now, frequently, whenever she came over to Brompton,—all the actors in that bygone drama of her life, save the hero himself. It was the play of *Hamlet* with Hamlet left out, indeed. But what vast proportions did she then assume compared to what she had been lately! There were Rosencrantz and Guildenstern,—the one in his mail-phaeton, the other on his matchless

hack; there was old Polonius in the high-collared bottle-green coat of thirty years back, guiding his clever cob in and out among the courtiers; there was the Honourable Osric, simpering and fooling among the fops. She hurried across the Drive or the Row on her way to or from Brompton, and stood up, a little distance off, gazing at these comrades of old times. She would press her hands to her head, and wonder whether it was all true or a dream; whether she was going back to the dull solemnity of Elm Lodge, when a dozen words would put her into that mail-phaeton—on to that horse! How often had Rosencrantz ogled! and was it not Guildenstern's billet that, after reading, she tore up and threw in his face? It was an awful temptation; and she was obliged, as an antidote, to picture to herself the tortures she had suffered from cold and want and starvation, to bring her round at all to a sensible line of thought.

Some one else had called upon her two or three times. O yes, a Miss Maurice, who came in a coroneted carriage, and to whom she had

taken a peculiar detestation; not from any airs she had given herself—O no; there was nothing of that kind about her. She was one of those persons, don't you know, who have known your husband before his marriage, and take an interest in him, and must like you for his sake! one of those persons who are so open and honest and above-board, that you take an immediate distrust of them at first sight, which you never get over. O no, Margaret was perfectly certain she should never like Annie Maurice.

Music she had, and books; but she was not very fond of the first, and only played desultorily. Geoff was most passionately fond of music; and sometimes after dinner he would ask for "a tune," and then Margaret would sit down at the piano and let her fingers wander over the keys, gradually finding them straying into some of the brilliant dance-music of Auber and Musard, of Jullien and Kœnig, with which she had been familiarised during her Continental experience. And as she played, the forms familiarly associated with the music came trooping out of the mist—

Henri, so grand in the *Cavalier seul,* Jules and Eulalie, so unapproachable in the *En avant deux.* There they whirled in the hot summer evenings; the *parterre,* illuminated with a thousand lamps glittering like fireflies, the sensuous strains of the orchestra soaring up to the great yellow-faced moon looking down upon it; and then the cosy little supper, the sparkling iced drink, the—"Time for bed, eh, dear?" from old Geoff, already nodding with premature sleep; and away flew the bright vision at the rattle of the chamber-candlestick.

Books! yes, no lack of them. Geoff subscribed for her to the library, and every week came the due supply of novels. These Margaret read, some in wonder, some in scorn. There was a great run upon the Magdalen just then in that style of literature; writers were beginning to be what is called "out-spoken;" and young ladies familiarised with the outward life of the species, as exhibited in the Park and at the Opera, read with avidity of their diamonds and their ponies, of the interior of the *ménage,* and of their spirited con-

versations with the cream of the male aristocracy. A deference to British virtue, and a desire to stand well with the librarian's subscribers, compelled an amount of repentance in the third volume which Margaret scarcely believed to be in accordance with truth. The remembrance of childhood's days, which made the ponies pall, and rendered the diamonds disgusting,—the inherent natural goodness, which took to eschewing of crinoline and the adoption of serge, which swamped the colonel in a storm of virtuous indignation, and brought the curate safely riding over the billows,—were agreeable incidents, but scarcely, she thought, founded on fact. Her own experience at least had taught her otherwise; but it might be so after all.

So her life wore drearily on. Would there never be any change in it? Yes, one change at least Time brought in his flight. Dr. Brandram's visits were now regular; and one morning a shrill cry resounded through the house, and the doctor placed in its father's arms a strong healthy boy.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT THEIR FRIENDS THOUGHT.

Geoffrey Ludlow had married and settled himself in a not-too-accessible suburb, but he had not given up such of his old companions as were on a footing of undeniable intimacy with him. These were few in number; for although Geoff was a general favourite from his urbanity and the absence of any thing like pretentiousness in his disposition, he was considered slow by most of the bolder spirits among the artist-band. He was older than many of them certainly, but that was scarcely the reason; for there were jolly old dogs whose presence never caused the smallest reticence of song or story—gray and bald-headed old boys, who held their own in scurrility and slang, and were among the latest sitters and the deepest drinkers of the set. It is needless to say

that in all their popularity—and they were popular after a fashion—there was not mingled one single grain of respect; while Geoffrey was respected as much as he was liked. But his shyness, his quiet domestic habits, and his perpetual hard work gave him little time for the cultivation of acquaintance, and he had only two really intimate friends, who were Charley Potts and William Bowker.

Charley Potts had been "best man" at the marriage, and Geoffrey had caught a glimpse of old Bowker in hiding behind a pillar of the church. It was meet, then, that they—old companions of his former life—should see him under his altered circumstances, should know and be received by his wife, and should have the opportunity, if they wished for it, of keeping up at least a portion of the *camaraderie* of old days. Therefore after his return to London, and when he and his wife were settled down in Elm Lodge, Geoffrey wrote to each of his old friends, and said how glad he would be to see them in his new house.

This note found Mr. Charles Potts intent upon a representation of Mr. Tennyson's "Dora," sitting with the child in the cornfield, a commission which he had received from Mr. Caniche, and which was to be paid for by no less a sum than a hundred and fifty pounds. The "Gil Blas" had proved a great success in the Academy, and had been purchased by a country rector, who had won a hundred-pound prize in the Art-Union; so that Charley was altogether in very high feather and pecuniary triumph. He had not made much alteration in the style of his living or in the furniture of his apartment; but he had cleared off a long score for beer and grog standing against him in the books kept by Caroline of signal fame; he had presented Caroline herself with a cheap black-lace shawl, which had produced something like an effect at Rosherville Gardens; and he had sent a ten-pound note to the old aunt who had taken care of him after his mother's death, and who wept tears of gratified joy on its receipt, and told all Sevenoaks of the talent and the goodness of her

nephew. He had paid off some other debts also, and lent a pound or two here and there among his friends, and was even after that a capitalist to the extent of having some twenty pounds in the stomach of a china sailor, originally intended as a receptacle for tobacco. His success had taken effect on Charley. He had begun to think that there was really something in him, after all; that life was, as the working-man observed, "not all beer and skittles;" and that if he worked honestly on, he might yet be able to realise a vision which had occasionally loomed through clouds of tobacco-smoke curling round his head; a vision of a pleasant cottage out at Kilburn, or better still at Cricklewood; with a bit of green lawn and a little conservatory, and two or three healthy children tumbling about; while their mother, uncommonly like Matilda Ludlow, looked on from the ivy-covered porch; and their father, uncommonly like himself, was finishing in the studio that great work which was to necessitate his election into the Academy. This vision had a peculiar charm for him; he worked away like

a horse; the telegraphic signals to Caroline and the consequent supply of beer became far less frequent; he began to eschew late nights, which he found led to late mornings; and the "Dora" was growing under his hand day by day.

He was hard at work and had apparently worked himself into a knot, for he was standing a little distance from his easel, gazing vacantly at the picture and twirling his moustache with great vigour,—a sure sign of worry with him,—when the "tugging of the trotter" was heard, and on his opening the door, Mr. Bowker presented himself and walked in.

"'Tis I! Bowker the undaunted! Ha, ha!" and Mr. Bowker gave two short stamps, and lunged with his walking-stick at his friend. "Give your William drink; he is a-thirst. What! nothing of a damp nature about? Potts, virtue and industry are good things; and your William has been glad to observe that of late you have been endeavouring to practise both; but industry is not incompatible with pale ale, and nimble fingers are oft allied to a dry palate.

That sounds like one of the headings of the pages from Maunders' *Treasury of Knowledge.*—Send for some beer!"

The usual pantomime was gone through by Mr. Potts, and while it was in process, Bowker filled a pipe and walked towards the easel. "Very good, Charley; very good indeed. Nice fresh look in that girl—not the usual burnt-umber rusticity; but something—not quite—like the real ruddy peasant bronze. Child not bad either; looks as if it had got its feet in boxing-gloves, though; you must alter that; and don't make its eyes quite so much like willow-pattern saucers. What's that on the child's head?"

"Hair, of course."

"And what stuff's that the girl's sitting in?"

"Corn! cornfield—wheat, you know, and that kind of stuff. What do you mean? why do you ask?"

"Only because it seems to your William that both substances are exactly alike. If it's hair, then the girl is sitting in a hair-field; if it's

corn, then the child has got corn growing on its head."

"It'll have it growing on its feet some day, I suppose," growled Mr. Potts, with a grin. "You're quite right, though, old man; we'll alter that at once.—Well, what's new with you?"

"New? Nothing! I hear nothing, see nothing, and know nobody. I might be a hermit-crab, only I shall never creep into any body else's shell; my own—five feet ten by two feet six—will be ready quite soon enough for me. Stop! what stuff I'm talking! I very nearly forgot the object of my coming round to you this morning. Your William is asked into society! Look; here's a letter I received last night from our Geoff, asking me to come up to see his new house and be introduced to his wife."

"I had a similar one this morning."

"I thought that was on the cards, so I came round to see what you were going to do."

"Do? I shall go, of course. So will you, won't you?"

"Well, Charley, I don't know. I'm a queer

old skittle, that has been knocked about in all manner of ways, and that has had no women's society for many years. So much the better, perhaps. I'm not pretty to look at; and I couldn't talk the stuff women like to have talked to them, and I should be horribly bored if I had to listen to it. So—and yet—God forgive me for growling so!—there are times when I'd give any thing for a word of counsel and comfort in a woman's voice, for the knowledge that there was any woman—good woman, mind!—no matter what—mother, sister, wife—who had an interest in what I did. There! never mind that."

Mr. Bowker stopped abruptly. Charley Potts waited for a minute; then putting his hand affectionately on his friend's shoulder, said: "But our William will make an exception for our Geoff. You've known him so long, and you're so fond of him."

"Fond of him! God bless him! No one could know Geoff without loving him, at least no one whose love was worth having. But you see there's the wife to be taken into account now."

"You surely wouldn't doubt your reception by her? The mere fact of your being an old friend of her husband's would be sufficient to make you welcome."

"O, Mr. Potts, Mr. Potts! you are as innocent as a sucking-dove, dear Mr. Potts, though you have painted a decent picture! To have known a man before his marriage is to be the natural enemy of his wife. However, I'll chance that, and go and see our Geoff."

"So shall I," said Potts, "though I'm rather doubtful about *my* reception. You see I was with Geoff that night,—you know, when we met the—his wife, you know."

"So you were. Haven't you seen her since?"

"Only at the wedding, and that all in a hurry—just an introduction; that was all."

"Did she seem at all confused when she recognised you?"

"She couldn't have recognised me, because when we found her she was senseless, and hadn't come-to when we left. But of course Geoff had

told her who I was, and she didn't seem in the least confused."

"Not she, if there's any truth in physiognomy," muttered old Bowker; "well, if she showed no annoyance at first meeting you, she's not likely to do so now, and you'll be received sweetly enough, no doubt. We may as well go together, eh?"

To this proposition Mr. Potts consented with great alacrity, for though a leader of men in his own set, he was marvellously timid, silent, and ill at ease in the society of ladies. The mere notion of having to spend a portion of time, however short, in company with members of the other sex above the rank of Caroline, and with whom he could not exchange that free and pleasant *badinage* of which he was so great a master, inflicted torture on him sufficient to render him an object of compassion. So on a day agreed upon, the artistic pair set out to pay their visit to Mrs. Geoffrey Ludlow.

Their visit took place at about the time when public opinion in Lowbar was unsettled as to

the propriety of knowing the Ludlows; and the dilatoriness of some of the inhabitants in accepting the position of the new-comers may probably be ascribed to the fact of the visitors having been encountered in the village. It is undeniable that the appearance of Mr. Potts and of Mr. Bowker was not calculated to impress the beholder with a feeling of respect, or a sense of their position in society. Holding this to be a gala-day, Mr. Potts had extracted a bank-note from the stomach of the china sailor, and expended it at the "emporium" of an outfitter in Oxford Street, in the purchase of a striking, but particularly ill-fitting, suit of checked clothes—coat, waistcoat, and trousers to match. His boots, of an unyielding leather, had very thick clump soles, which emitted curious wheezings and groanings as he walked; and his puce-coloured gloves were baggy at all the fingers' ends, and utterly impenetrable as regarded the thumbs. His white hat was a little on one side, and his moustaches were twisted with a ferocity which, however fascinating to the maid-servants at the kitchen-windows, failed to please the rural-

ising cits and citizenesses, who were accustomed to regard a white hat as the distinctive badge of card-sharpers, and a moustache as the outward and visible sign of swindling. Mr. Bowker had made little difference in his ordinary attire. He wore a loose shapeless brown garment which was more like a cloth dressing-gown than a paletot; a black waistcoat frayed at the pockets from constant contact with his pipe-stem, and so much too short that the ends of his white-cotton braces were in full view; also a pair of gray trousers of the cut which had been in fashion when their owner was in fashion—made very full over the boot, and having broad leather straps. Mr. Bowker also wore a soft black wideawake hat, and perfumed the fragrant air with strong cavendish tobacco, fragments of which decorated his beard. The two created a sensation as they strode up the quiet High Street; and when they rang at Elm Lodge Geoffrey's pretty servant-maid was ready to drop between admiration at Mr. Potts's appearance and a sudden apprehension that Mr. Bowker had come after the plate.

She had, however, little time for the indulgence of either feeling; for Geoffrey, who had been expecting the arrival of his friends, with a degree of nervousness unintelligible to himself, no sooner heard the bell than he rushed out from his studio and received his old comrades with great cordiality. He shook hands heartily with Charley Potts; but a certain hesitation mingled with the warmth of his greeting of Bowker; and his talk rattled on from broken sentence to broken sentence, as though he were desirous of preventing his friend from speaking until he himself had had his say.

"How d'ye do, Charley? so glad to see you; and you, Bowker, my good old friend: it is thoroughly kind of you to come out here; and—long way, you know, and out of your usual beat, I know. Well, so you see I've joined the noble army of martyrs,—not that I mean that, of course; but—eh, you didn't expect I would do it, did you? I couldn't say, like the girl in the Scotch song, 'I'm owre young to marry yet,' could I? However, thank God, I think you'll say my wife is—

what a fellow I am! keeping you fellows out here in this broiling sun; and you haven't—at least you, Bowker, haven't been introduced to her. Come along—come in!"

He preceded them to the drawing-room, where Margaret was waiting to receive them. It was a hot staring day in the middle of a hot staring summer. The turf was burnt brown; the fields spreading between Elm Lodge and Hampstead, usually so cool and verdant, were now arid wastes; the outside blinds of the house were closed to exclude the scorching light, and there was no sound save the loud chirping of grasshoppers. A great weariness was on Margaret that day; she had tried to rouse herself, but found it impossible, so had sat all through the morning staring vacantly before her, busy with old memories. Between her past and her present life there was so little in common, that these memories were seldom roused by associations. The dull never-changing domestic day, and the pretty respectability of Elm Lodge, did not recal the wild Parisian revels, the rough pleasant Bohemianism of garrison-lodgings,

the sumptuous luxury of the Florentine villa. But there was something in the weather to-day—in the bright fierce glare of the sun, in the solemn utterly-unbroken stillness—which brought back to her mind one when she and Leonard and some others were cruising off the Devonshire coast in Tom Marshall's yacht; a day on which, with scarcely a breath of air to be felt, they lay becalmed in Babbicombe Bay; under an awning, of course, over which the men from time to time worked the fire-hose; and how absurdly funny Tom Marshall was when the ice ran short. Leonard said——The gate-bell rang, and her husband's voice was heard in hearty welcome of his friends.

In welcome of his friends! Yes, there at least she could do her duty; there she could give pleasure to her husband. She could not give him her love; she had tried, and found it utterly impossible; but equally impossible was it to withhold from him her respect. Day by day she honoured him more and more; as she watched his patient honesty, his indomitable energy, his

thorough helplessness; as she learned—in spite of herself as it were—more of himself; for Geoff had always thought one of the chiefest pleasures of matrimony must be to have some one capable of receiving all one's confidences. As she, with a certain love of psychological analysis possessed by some women, went through his character, and discovered loyalty and truth in every thought and every deed, she felt half angry with herself for her inability to regard him with that love which his qualities ought to have inspired. She had been accustomed to tell herself, and half-believed, that she had no conscience; but this theory, which she had maintained during nearly all the earlier portion of her life, vanished as she learned to know and to appreciate her husband. She had a conscience, and she felt it; under its influence she made some struggles, ineffectual indeed, but greater than she at one time would have attempted. What was it that prevented her from giving this man his due, her heart's love? He appearance? No; he was not a "girl's man" certainly, not the delicious military vision which

sets throbbing the hearts of sweet seventeen: by no means romantic-looking, but a thoroughly manly gentleman—big, strong, and well-mannered. Had he been dwarfed or deformed, vulgar, dirty—and even in the present days of tubbing and Turkish baths, there are men who possess genius and are afraid it may come off in hot water,—had he been "common," an expressive word meaning something almost as bad as dirt and vulgarity,—Margaret could have satisfied her newly-found conscience, or at least accounted for her feelings. But he was none of these, and she admitted it; and so at the conclusion of her self-examination fell back, not without a feeling of semi-complacency, to the conviction that it was not he, but she herself who was in fault; that she did not give him her heart simply because she had no heart to give; that she had lived and loved, but that, however long she might yet live, she could never love again.

These thoughts passed rapidly through her mind, not for the first, nor even for the hun-

dredth time, as she sat down upon the sofa and took up the first book which came to hand, not even making a pretence of reading it, but allowing it to lie listlessly on her lap. Geoffrey came first, closely followed by Charley Potts, who advanced in a sheepish way, holding out his hand. Margaret smiled slightly and gave him her hand with no particular expression, a little dignified perhaps, but even that scarcely noticeable. Then Bowker, who had kept his keen eyes upon her from the moment he entered the room, and whom she had seen and examined while exchanging civilities with Potts, was brought forward by Geoffrey, and introduced as "one of my oldest and dearest friends." Margaret advanced as Bowker approached, her face flushed a little, and her eyes wore their most earnest expression, as she said, "I am very glad to see you, Mr. Bowker. I have heard of you from Geoffrey. I am sure we shall be very good friends." She gripped his hand and looked him straight in the face as she said this, and in that instant William Bowker divined that Margaret had heard of,

and knew and sympathised with, the story of his life.

She seemed tacitly to acknowledge that there was a bond of union between them. She was as polite as could be expected of her to Charley Potts; but she addressed herself especially to Bowker when any point for discussion arose. These were not very frequent, for the conversation carried on was of a very ordinary kind. How they liked their new house, and whether they had seen much of the people of the neighbourhood; how they had enjoyed their honeymoon in the Isle of Wight; and trivialities of a similar character. Charley Potts, prevented by force of circumstances from indulging in his peculiar humour, and incapable from sheer ignorance of bearing his share of general conversation when a lady was present, had several times attempted to introduce the one subject, which, in any society, he could discuss at his ease, art—"shop;" but on each occasion had found his proposition rigorously ignored both by Margaret and Bowker, who seemed to consider it

out of place, and who were sufficiently interested in their own talk. So Charley fell back upon Geoff, who, although delighted at seeing how well his wife was getting on with his friend, yet had sufficient kindness of heart to step in to Charley's rescue, and to discuss with him the impossibility of accounting for the high price obtained by Smudge; the certainty that Scumble's popularity would be merely evanescent; the disgraceful favouritism displayed by certain men "on the council;" in short, all that kind of talk which is so popular and so unfailing in the simple kindly members of the art-world. So on throughout lunch; and, indeed, until the mention of Geoffrey's pictures then in progress necessitated the generalising of the conversation, and they went away (Margaret with them) to the studio. Arrived within those walls, Mr. Potts, temporarily oblivious of the presence of a lady, became himself again. The mingled smell of turpentine and tobacco, the sight of the pictures on the easels, and of Geoff's pipe-rack on the wall, a general air of carelessness and dis-

comfort, all came gratefully to Mr. Potts, who opened his chest, spread out his arms, shook himself as does a dog just emerged from the water—probably in his case to get rid of any clinging vestige of respectability—and said in a very hungry tone:

"Now, Geoff, let's have a smoke, old boy."

"You might as well wait until you knew whether Mrs. Ludlow made any objection, Charley," said Bowker, in a low tone.

"I beg Mrs. Ludlow's pardon," said Potts, scarlet all over; "I had no notion that she—"

"Pray don't apologise, Mr. Potts; I am thoroughly accustomed to smoke; have been for—"

"Yes, of course; ever since you married Geoff you have been thoroughly smoke-dried," interrupted Bowker, at whom Margaret shot a short quick glance, half of interrogation, half of gratitude.

They said no more on the smoke subject just then, but proceeded to a thorough examination of the picture, which Charley Potts pronounced "regularly stunning," and which Mr. Bowker

criticised in a much less explosive manner. He praised the drawing, the painting, the general arrangement; he allowed that Geoffrey was doing every thing requisite to obtain for himself name, fame, and wealth in the present day; but he very much doubted whether that was all that was needed. With the French judge he would very much have doubted the necessity of living, if to live implied the abnegation of the first grand principles of art, its humanising and elevating influence. Bowker saw no trace of these in the undeniable cleverness of the Brighton Esplanade; and though he was by no means sparing of his praise, his lack of enthusiasm, as compared with the full-flavoured ecstasy of Charley Potts, struck upon Margaret's ear. Shortly afterwards, while Geoffrey and Potts were deep in a discussion on colour, she turned to Mr. Bowker, and said abruptly:

"You are not satisfied with Geoffrey's picture?"

He smiled somewhat grimly as he said, "Satisfied is a very strong word, Mrs. Ludlow. There

are some of us in the world who have sufficient good sense not to be satisfied with what we do ourselves—"

"That's true, Heaven knows," she interrupted involuntarily.

"And are consequently not particularly likely to be content with what's done by other people. I think Geoff's picture good, very good of its sort; but I don't—I candidly confess—like its sort. He is a man full of appreciation of nature, character, and sentiment; a man who, in the expression of his own art, is as capable of rendering poetic feeling as—By Jove, now why didn't he think of that subject that Charley Potts has got under weigh just now? That would have suited Geoff exactly."

"What is it?"

"Dora—Tennyson's Dora, you know." Margaret bowed in acquiescence. "There's a fine subject, if you like. Charley's painting it very well, so far as it goes; but he doesn't feel it. Now Geoff would. A man must have something more than facile manipulation; he must have the

soul of a poet before he could depict the expression which must necessarily be on such a face. There are few who could understand, fewer still who could interpret to others, such heart-feelings of that most beautiful of Tennyson's creations as would undoubtedly show themselves in her face; the patient endurance of unrequited love, which 'loves on through all ills, and loves on till she dies;' which neither the contempt nor the death of its object can extinguish, but which then flows, in as pure, if not as strong, a current towards his widow and his child."

Margaret had spoken at first, partly for the sake of saying something, partly because her feeling for her husband admitted of great pride in his talent, which she thought Bowker had somewhat slighted. But now she was thoroughly roused, her eyes bright, her hair pushed back off her face, listening intently to him. When he ceased, she looked up strangely, and said:

"Do you believe in the existence of such love?"

"O yes," he replied; "it's rare, of course.

Especially rare is the faculty of loving hopelessly without the least chance of return—loving steadfastly and honestly as Dora did, I mean. With most people unrequited love turns into particularly bitter hatred, or into that sentimental maudlin state of 'broken heart,' which is so comforting to its possessor and so wearying to his friends. But there *are* exceptional cases where such love exists, and in these, no matter how fought against, it can never be extinguished."

"I suppose you are right," said Margaret; "there must be such instances."

Bowker looked hard at her, but she had risen from her seat and was rejoining the others.

"What's your opinion of Mrs. Ludlow, William?" asked Charley Potts, as they walked away puffing their pipes in the calm summer-night air. "Handsome woman, isn't she?"

"Very handsome!" replied Bowker; "wondrously handsome!" Then reflectively—"It's a long time since your William has seen any thing

like that. All in all—face, figure, manner—wondrously perfect! She walks like a Spaniard, and—"

"Yes, Geoff's in luck; at least I suppose he is. There's something about her which is not quite to my taste. I think I like a British element, which is not to be found in her. I don't know what it is—only something—well, something less of the duchess about her. I don't think she's quite in our line—is she, Bowker, old boy?"

"That's because you're very young in the world's ways, Charley, and also because Geoff's wife is not very like Geoff's sister, I'm thinking." Whereat Mr. Potts grew very red, told his friend to "shut up!" and changed the subject.

That night Mr. Bowker sat on the edge of his truckle-bed in his garret in Hart Street, Bloomsbury, holding in his left hand a faded portrait in a worn morocco case. He looked at it long and earnestly, while his right hand wafted aside the thick clouds of tobacco-smoke pouring over it from his pipe. He knew every line of it, every touch of colour in it; but he sat gazing at it

this night as though it were an entire novelty, studying it with a new interest.

"Yes," said he at length, "she's very like you, my darling, very like you,—hair, eyes, shape, all like; and she seems to have that same clinging, undying love which you had, my darling—that same resistless, unquenchable, undying love. But that love is not for Geoff; God help him, dear fellow! that love is not for Geoff!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MARGARET AND ANNIE.

The meeting between Margaret and Annie Maurice, which Geoffrey had so anxiously desired, had taken place, but could scarcely be said to have been successful in its result. With the best intention possible, and indeed with a very earnest wish that these two women should like each other very much, Geoff had said so much about the other to each, as to beget a mutual distrust and dislike before they became acquainted. Margaret could not be jealous of Geoffrey; her regard for him was not sufficiently acute to admit any such feeling. But she rebelled secretly against the constant encomiastic mention of Annie, and grew wearied at and annoyed with the perpetually-iterated stories of Miss Maurice's goodness with which Geoffrey regaled her. A good daughter! Well,

what of that? She herself had been a good daughter until temptation assailed her, and probably Miss Maurice had never been tempted.—So simple, honest, and straightforward! Yes, she detested women of that kind; behind the mask of innocence and virtue they frequently carried on the most daring schemes. Annie in her turn thought she had heard quite enough about Mrs. Ludlow's hair and eyes, and wondered Geoff had never said any thing about his wife's character or disposition. It was quite right, of course, that he, an artist, should marry a pretty person; but he was essentially a man who would require something more than mere beauty in his life's companion, and as yet he had not hinted at any accomplishments which his wife possessed. There was a something in Lord Caterham's tone, when speaking to and of Geoffrey Ludlow, which had often jarred upon Annie's ear, and which she now called to mind in connection with these thoughts —a certain tinge of pity more akin to contempt than to love. Annie had noticed that Caterham never assumed this tone when he was talking to

Geoffrey about his art; then he listened deferentially or argued with spirit; but when matters of ordinary life formed the topics of conversation her cousin seemed to regard Geoffrey as a kind of large-hearted boy, very generous, very impulsive, but thoroughly inexperienced. Could Arthur Caterham's reading of Geoffrey Ludlow's character be the correct one? Was he, out of his art, so weak, vacillating, and easily led? and had he been caught by mere beauty of face? and had he settled himself down to pass his life with a woman of whose disposition he knew nothing? Annie Maurice put this question to herself with a full conviction that she would be able to answer it after her introduction to Mrs. Ludlow.

About a week after Geoffrey had given his first drawing-lesson in St. Barnabas Square, Annie drove off one afternoon to Elm Lodge in Lady Beauport's barouche. She had begged hard to be allowed to go in a cab, but Lord Caterham would not hear of it; and as Lady Beauport had had a touch of neuralgia (there were very few illnesses she permitted to attack her, and those only

of an aristocratic nature), and had been confined to the house, no objection was made. So the barouche, with the curly-wigged coachman and silver-headed footman on the box, went spinning through Camden and Kentish Towns, where the coachman pointed with his whip to rows of small houses bordering the roadside, and wondered what sort of people could live "in such little 'oles;" and the footman expressed his belief that the denizens were "clerks and poor coves of that kind." The children of the neighbourhood ran out in admiration of the whole turn-out, and especially of the footman's hair, which afforded them subject-matter for discussion during the evening, some contending that his head had been snowed upon; some insisting that it "grew so;" and others propounding a belief that he was a very old man, and that his white hair was merely natural. When the carriage dashed up to the gates of Elm Lodge, the Misses Coverdale next door were, as they afterwards described themselves, "in a perfect twitter of excitement;" because, though good carriages and handsome horses were by no means rare in

the pretty suburb, no one had as yet ventured to ask his servant to wear hair-powder; and the coronet, immediately spied on the panels, had a wonderful effect.

The visit was not unexpected by either Margaret or Geoffrey; but the latter was at the moment closely engaged with Mr. Stompff, who had come up to make an apparently advantageous proposition; so that when Annie Maurice was shown into the drawing-room, she found Margaret there alone. At sight of her, Annie paused in sheer admiration. Margaret was dressed in a light striped muslin; her hair taken off her face and twisted into a large roll behind; her only ornaments a pair of long gold earrings. At the announcement of Miss Maurice's name, a slight flush came across her face, heightening its beauty. She rose without the smallest sign of hurry, grandly and calmly, and advanced a few paces. She saw the effect she had produced and did not intend that it should be lessened. It was Annie who spoke first, and Annie's hand was the first outstretched.

"I must introduce myself, Mrs. Ludlow," said she, "though I suppose you have heard of me from your husband. He and I are very old friends."

"O, Miss Maurice?" said Margaret, as though half doubtful to whom she was talking. "O yes; Geoffrey has mentioned your name several times. Pray sit down."

All this in the coldest tone and with the stiffest manner. Prejudiced originally, Margaret, in rising, had caught a glimpse through the blinds of the carriage, and regarded it as an assertion of dignity and superiority on her visitor's part, which must be at once counteracted.

"I should have come to see you long before, Mrs. Ludlow, but my time is not my own, as you probably know; and—"

"Yes, Mr. Ludlow told me you were Lady Beauport's companion." A hit at the carriage there.

"Yes," continued Annie with perfect composure, though she felt the blow, "I am Lady Beauport's companion, and consequently not a

free agent, or, as I said, I should have called on you long ago."

Margaret had expected a hit in exchange for her own, which she saw had taken effect. A little mollified by her adversary's tolerance, she said:

"I should have been very glad to see you, Miss Maurice; and in saying so I pay no compliment; for I should have been very glad to see any body to break this fearful monotony."

"You find it dull here?"

"I find it dreary in the extreme."

"And I was only thinking how perfectly charming it is. This sense of thorough quiet is of all things the most pleasant to me. It reminds me of the place where the happiest days in my life have been passed; and now, after the fever and excitement of London, it seems doubly grateful. But perhaps you have been accustomed to gaiety."

"Yes; at least, if not to gaiety to excitement; to having every hour of the day filled up with something to do; to finding the time flown before I scarcely new it had arrived, instead of

watching the clock and wondering that it was not later in the day."

"Ah, then of course you feel the change very greatly at first; but I think you will find it wear off. One's views of life alter so after we have tried the new phase for a little time. It seems strange my speaking to you in this way, Mrs. Ludlow; but I have had a certain amount of experience. There was my own dear home; and then I lived with my uncle at a little country parsonage, and kept house for him; and then I became—Lady Beauport's companion."

A bright red patch burned on Margaret's cheek as Annie said these words. Was it shame? Was the quiet earnestness, the simple courtesy and candour of this frank-eyed bright girl getting over her?

"That was very difficult at first, I confess," Annie continued; "every thing was so strange to me, just as it may be to you here, but I had come from the quietude to the gaiety; and I thought at one time it would be impossible for me to continue there. But I held on, and I man-

age to get on quite comfortably now. They are all very kind to me; and the sight of Mr. Ludlow occasionally, insures my never forgetting the old days."

"It would be strange if they were not kind to you," said Margaret, looking fixedly at her. "I understand now what Geoffrey has told me about you. We shall be friends, shall we not?" suddenly extending her hand.

"The very best of friends!" said Annie, returning the pressure; "and, dear Mrs. Ludlow, you will soon get over this feeling of dulness. These horrible household duties, which are so annoying at first, become a regular part of the day's business, and, unconsciously to ourselves, we owe a great deal to them for helping us through the day. And then you must come out with me whenever I can get the carriage,—O, I've brought Lady Beauport's card, and she is coming herself as soon as she gets out again,—and we'll go for a drive in the Park. I can quite picture to myself the sensation you would make."

Margaret smiled—a strange hard smile—but said nothing.

"And then you must be fond of reading; and I don't know whether Mr. Ludlow has changed, but there was nothing he used to like so much as being read to while he was at work. Whenever he came to the Priory, papa and I used to sit in the little room where he painted and take it in turns to read to him. I daresay he hasn't liked to ask you, fearing it might bore you; and you haven't liked to suggest it, from an idea that you might interrupt his work."

"O yes, I've no doubt it will come right," said Margaret, indisposed to enter into detail; "and I know I can rely on your help; only one thing—don't mention what I have said to Geoffrey, please; it might annoy him; and he is so good, that I would not do that for the world."

"He will not hear a word of it from me. It would annoy him dreadfully, I know. He is so thoroughly wrapped up in you, that to think you were not completely happy would cause him great

pain. Yes, he is good. Papa used to say he did not know so good a man, and—"

The door opened as she spoke, and Geoff entered the room. His eyes brightened as he saw the two women together in close conversation; and he said with a gay laugh:

"Well, little Annie, you've managed to find us out, have you?—come away from the marble halls, and brought 'vassals and serfs by your side,' and all the king's horses and all the king's men, up to our little hut. And you introduced yourself to Margaret, and you're beginning to understand one another, eh?"

"I think we understand each other perfectly; and what nonsense you talk about the vassals and king's horses, and all that! They would make me have the carriage; and no one but a horrible democrat like you would see any harm in using it."

"Democrat?—I?—the stanchest supporter of our aristocracy and our old institutions. I intend to have a card printed, with 'Instruction in drawing to the youthful nobility and gentry. Re-

ferences kindly permitted to the Earl of B., Lord C., &c.'—Well, my child," turning to Margaret, "you'll think your husband more venerable than ever after seeing this young lady; and remembering that he used to nurse her in his arms."

"I have been telling Miss Maurice that now I have seen her, I can fully understand all you have said about her; and she has promised to come and see me often, and to take me out with her."

"That's all right," said Geoffrey; "nothing will please me better.—It's dull for her here, Annie, all alone; and I'm tied to my easel all day."

"O, that will be all right, and we shall get on capitally together, shall we not, Annie?"

And the women kissed one another, and followed Geoffrey into the garden.

That was the brightest afternoon Margaret had spent for many a day. The carriage was dismissed to the inn, there to be the admiration of the ostlers and idlers; while the coachman and footman, after beer, condescended to play skittles and to receive the undisguised compliments of the village boys. Geoffrey went back to his work; and Margaret

and Annie had a long talk, in which, though it was not very serious, Annie's good sense perpetually made itself felt, and at the end of which Margaret felt calmer, happier, and more hopeful than she had felt since her marriage. After the carriage had driven away, she sat pondering over all that had been said. This, then, was the Miss Maurice against whom she had conceived such a prejudice, and whom "she was sure she could never like"? And now, here, at their very first meeting, she had given her her confidence, and listened to her as though she had been her sister! What a calm quiet winning way she had! with what thorough good sense she talked! Margaret had expected to find her a prim old-maidish kind of person, younger, of course, but very much of the same type as the Miss Coverdales next door, utterly different from the fresh pretty-looking girl full of spirits and cheerfulness. How admirably she would have suited Geoff as a wife! and yet what was there in her that she (Margaret) could not acquire? It all rested with herself; her husband's heart was hers firmly and undoubtedly,

and she only needed to look her lot resolutely in the face, to conform to the ordinary domestic routine, as Annie had suggested, and all would be well. O, if she could but lay the ghosts of that past which haunted her so incessantly, if she could but forget *him*, and all the associations connected with him, her life might yet be thoroughly happy!

And Annie, what did she think of her new acquaintance? Whatever her sentiments were, she kept them to herself, merely saying in answer to questions that Mrs. Geoffrey Ludlow was the most beautiful woman she had ever seen; that she could say with perfect truth and in all sincerity; but as to the rest, she did not know—she could scarcely make up her mind. During the first five minutes of their interview she hated her, at least regarded her with that feeling which Annie imagined was hate, but which was really only a mild dislike. There were few women, Annie supposed, who could in cold blood, and without the slightest provocation, have committed such an outrage as that taunt about her position in Lady Beauport's household; but then again there were few who

would have so promptly, though silently, acknowledged the fault and endeavoured to make reparation for it. How openly she spoke! how bitterly she bemoaned the dulness of her life! That did not argue well for Geoffrey's happiness; but doubtless Mrs. Ludlow had reason to feel dull, as have most brides taken from their home and friends, and left to spend the day by themselves; but if she had really loved her husband, she would have hesitated before thus complaining to a stranger —would for his sake have either endeavoured to throw some explanatory gloss over the subject, or remained silent about it. She did not seem, so far as Annie saw, to have made any attempt to please her husband, or indeed to care to do so. How different she was from what Annie had expected! how different from all her previous experience of young married women, who indeed generally "gushed" dreadfully, and were painfully extravagant in their laudations of their husbands when they were absent, and in their connubialities when they were present. Geoffrey's large eloquent eyes had melted into tenderness as he looked at her;

but she had not returned the glance, had not interchanged with him one term of endearment, one chance pressure of the hand. What did it all mean? What was that past gaiety and excitement to which she said she had been accustomed? What were her antecedents? In the whole of her long talk with Annie, Margaret had spoken always of the future, never of the past. It was of what she should do that she asked counsel; never mentioning what she had done; never alluding to any person, place, or circumstance connected with her existence previously to her having become Geoffrey Ludlow's wife. What were her antecedents? Once or twice during their talk she had used an odd word, a strange phrase, which grated on Annie's ear; but her manner was that of a well-bred gentlewoman; and in all the outward and visible signs of race, she might have been the purest aristocrat.

Meantime her beauty was undeniable, was overwhelming. Such hair and eyes Annie had dreamed of, but had never seen. She raved about them until Caterham declared she must puzzle her brain to find some excuse for his

going to Elm Lodge to see this wonderful woman. She described Margaret to Lady Beauport, who was good enough to express a desire to see "the young person." She mentioned her to Algy Barford, who listened and then said, "Nice! nice! Caterham, dear old boy! you and I will take our slates and go up to—what's the name of the place?—to learn drawing. Must learn on slates, dear boy. Don't you recollect the house of our childhood with the singular perspective and an enormous amount of smoke, like wool, coming out of the chimneys? Must have been a brewery by the amount of smoke, by Jove! And the man in the cocked-hat, with no stomach to speak of, and both his arms very thin, with round blobs at the end growing out of one side. Delicious reminiscences of one's childhood, by Jove!"

And then Annie took to sketching after-memory portraits of Margaret, first mere pencil outlines, then more elaborate shaded attempts, and finally a water-colour reminiscence, which was any thing but bad. This she showed to

Lord Caterham, who was immensely pleased with it, and who insisted that Barford should see it. So one morning when that pleasantest of laughing philosophers was smoking his after-breakfast cigar (at about noon) in Caterham's room, mooning about amongst the nick-nacks, and trotting out his little scraps of news in his own odd quaint fashion, Annie, who had heard from Stephens of his arrival, came in, bringing the portrait with her.

"Enter, Miss Maurice!" said Algy; "always welcome, but more especially welcome when she brings some delicious little novelty such as I see she now holds under her arm. What would the world be without novelty?—Shakespeare. At least, if that delightful person did not make that remark, it was simply because he forgot it; for it's just one of those sort of things which he put so nicely. And what is Miss Maurice's novelty?"

"O! it's no novelty at all, Mr. Barford. Only a sketch of Mrs. Geoffrey Ludlow, of whom I spoke to you the other day. You recollect?"

"Recollect! the Muse of Painting! Terps—

Clio—no matter! a charming person from whom we were to have instruction in drawing, and who lives at some utterly unsearchable place! Of course I recollect! And you have a sketch of her there? Now, my dear Miss Maurice, don't keep me in suspense any longer, but let me look at it at once." But when the sketch was unrolled and placed before him, it had the very singular effect of reducing Algy Barford to a state of quietude. Beyond giving one long whistle he never uttered a sound, but sat with parted lips and uplifted eyebrows gazing at the picture for full five minutes. Then he said, "This is like, of course, Miss Maurice?"

"Well, I really think I may say it is. It is far inferior to the original in beauty, of course; but I think I have preserved her most delicate features."

"Just so. Her hair is of that peculiar colour, and her eyes a curious violet, eh?"

"Yes."

"This sketch gives one the notion of a tall woman with a full figure."

"Yes; she is taller than I, and her figure is thoroughly rounded and graceful."

"Ye-es; a very charming sketch, Miss Maurice; and your friend must be very lovely if she at all resembles it."

Shortly after, when Mr. Algy Barford had taken his leave, he stopped on the flags in St. Barnabas Square, thus soliloquising: "All right, my dear old boy, my dear old Algy! it's coming on fast—a little sooner than you thought; but that's no matter. Colney Hatch, my dear boy, and a padded room looking out over the railway. That's it; that's your hotel, dear boy! If you ever drank, it might be *del. trem.*, and would pass off; but you don't. No, no; to see twice within six months, first the woman herself, and then the portrait of the woman—just married and known to credible witnesses—whom you have firmly believed to be lying in Kensal Green! Colney Hatch, dear old boy; that is the apartment, and nothing else!"

CHAPTER IX.

MR. AMPTHILL'S WILL.

THE acquaintance between Margaret and Annie, which commenced so auspiciously, scarcely ripened into intimacy. When Lady Beauport's neuralgia passed away,—and her convalescence was much hurried by the near approach of a specially-grand entertainment given in honour of certain Serene Transparencies then visiting London,—she found that she could not spare Miss Maurice to go so long a distance, to be absent from her and her work for such a length of time. As to calling at Elm Lodge in person, Lady Beauport never gave the project another thought. With the neuralgia had passed away her desire to see that "pretty young person," Mrs. Geoffrey Ludlow; and in sending her card by Annie, Lady Beauport thought she had more than fulfilled any promises

and vows of politeness which might have been made by her son in her name.

Lord Caterham had driven out once to Elm Lodge with Annie, and had been introduced to Margaret, whom he admired very much, but about whom he shook his head alarmingly when he and Annie were driving towards home. "That's an unhappy woman!" he said; "an unhappy woman, with something on her mind—something which she does not give way to and groan about, but against which she frets and fights and struggles with as with a chain. When she's not spoken to, when she's not supposed to be *en évidence*, there's a strange, half-weary, half-savage gleam in those wondrous eyes, such as I have noticed only once before, and then among the patients of a lunatic asylum. There's evidently something strange in the history of that marriage. Did you notice Ludlow's devotion to her, how he watched her every movement? Did you see what hard work it was for her to keep up with the conversation, not from want of power,—for, from one or two things she said, I should imagine her to be

a naturally clever as well as an educated woman, —but from want of will? How utterly worn and wearied and *distraite* she looked, standing by us in Ludlow's studio, while we talked about his pictures, and how she only seemed to rouse into life when I compared that Brighton Esplanade with the Drive in the Park, and talked about some of the frequenters of each. She listened to all the fashionable nonsense as eagerly as any country miss, and yet—— She's a strange study, that woman, Annie. I shall take an early opportunity of driving out to see her again; but I'm glad that the distance will prevent her being very intimate with you."

The opportunity of repeating his visit did not, however, speedily occur. The fierce neuralgic headaches from which Lord Caterham suffered had become much more frequent of late, and worse in their effect. After hours of actual torture, unable to raise his head or scarcely to lift his eyes, he would fall into a state of prostration, which lasted two or three days. In this state he would be dressed by his servant and carried to

his sofa, where he would lie with half-closed eyes dreaming the time away, comparatively happy in being free from pain, quite happy if, as frequently happened, on looking up he saw Annie Maurice moving noiselessly about the room dusting his books, arranging his desk, bringing fresh flowers for his glasses. Looking round at him from time to time, and finding he had noticed her presence, she would lay her finger on her lip enjoining silence, and then refresh his burning forehead and hands with eau-de-cologne, turn and smooth his pillows, and wheel his sofa to a cooler position. On the second day after an attack she would read to him for hours in her clear musical voice from his favourite authors; or, if she found him able to bear it, would sit down at the cabinet-piano, which he had bought expressly for her, and sing to him the songs he loved so well—quiet English ballads, sparkling little French *chansons*, and some of the most pathetic music of the Italian operas; but every thing for his taste must be soft and low: all roulades and execution, all the fireworks of music, he held in utter detestation.

Then Annie would be called away to write notes for Lady Beauport, or to go out with her or for her, and Caterham would be left alone again. Pleasanter his thoughts now: there were the flowers she had gathered and placed close by him, the books she had read from, the ivory keys which her dear fingers had so recently touched! Her cheerful voice still rung in his ear, the touch of her hand seemed yet to linger on his forehead. O angel of light and almost of hope to this wretched frame, O sole realisation of womanly love and tenderness and sweet sympathy to this crushed spirit, wilt thou ever know it all? Yes, he felt that there would come a time, and that without long delay, when he should be able to tell her all the secret longings of his soul, to tell her in a few short words, and then—ay, then!

Meanwhile it was pleasant to lie in a half-dreamy state, thinking of her, picturing her to his fancy. He would lie on that sofa, his poor warped useless limbs stretched out before him, but hidden from his sight by a light silk *couvrette* of Annie's embroidering, his eyes closed, his whole

frame in a state of repose. Through the double windows came deadened sounds of the world outside—the roll of carriages, the clanging of knockers, the busy hum of life. From the Square-garden came the glad voices of children, and now and then — solitary fragment of rusticity — the sound of the Square-gardener whetting his scythe. And Caterham lay day by day dreaming through it all, unroused even by the repetition of Czerny's pianoforte-exercises by the children in the next house; dreaming of his past, his present, and his future. Dreaming of the old farmhouse where they had sent him when a child to try and get strength—the quaint red-faced old house with its gable ends and mullioned windows, and its eternal and omnipresent smell of apples; of the sluggish black pool where the cattle stood knee-deep; the names of the fields—the home-croft, and the lea pasture, and the forty acres; the harvest home, and the songs that they sung then, and to which he had listened in wonder sitting on the farmer's knee. He had not thought of all this from that day forth; but he remembered it vividly now,

and could almost hear the loud ticking of the farmer's silver watch which fitted so tightly into his fob. The lodgings at Brighton, where he went with some old lady, never recollected but in connection with that one occasion, and called Miss Macraw,—the little lodgings with the bow-windowed room looking sideways over the sea; the happiness of that time, when the old lady perpetually talked to and amused him, when he was not left alone as he was at home, and when he had such delicious tea-cakes which he toasted for himself. The doctors who came to see him there; one a tall white-haired old man in a long black coat reaching to his heels, and another a jolly bald-headed man, who, they said, was surgeon to the King. The King—ay, he had seen him too, a red-faced man in a blue coat, walking in the Pavilion Gardens. Dreaming of the private tutor, a master at Charter House, who came on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, and who struggled so hard and with such little success to conceal his hatred to Homer, Virgil, and the other classic poets, and his longing to be in the

cricket-field, on the river, any where, to shake off that horrible conventional toil of tutorship, and to be a man and not a teaching-machine. Other recollections he had, of Lionel's pony and Lionel's Eton school-fellows, who came to see him in the holidays, and who stared in mute wonder at his wheel-chair and his poor crippled limbs. Recollections of his father and mother passing down the staircase in full dress on their way to some court-ball, and of his hearing the servants say what a noble-looking man his father was, and what a pity that Master Lionel had not been the eldest son. Recollections of the utter blankness of his life until she came—ah, until she came! The past faded away, and the present dawned. She was there, his star, his hope, his love! He was still a cripple, maimed and blighted; still worse than an invalid, the prey of acute and torturing disease; but he would be content—content to remain even as he was, so that he could have her near him, could see her, hear her voice, touch her hand. But that could not be. She would marry, would leave him, and then—ah then!—

Let that future which he believed to be close upon him come at once. Until he had known hope, his life, though blank enough, had been supportable; now hope had fled; "the sooner it's over the sooner to sleep." Let there be an end of it!

There were but few days that Algy Barford did not come; bright, airy, and cheerful, bringing sunshine into the sick-room; never noisy or obtrusive, always taking a cheery view of affairs, and never failing to tell the invalid that he looked infinitely better than the last time he had seen him, and that this illness was "evidently a kind of clearing-up shower before the storm, dear old boy," and was the precursor of such excellent health as he had never had before. Lord Caterham, of course, never believed any of this; he had an internal monitor which told him very different truths; but he knew the feelings which prompted Algy Barford's hopeful predictions, and no man's visits were so agreeable to Caterham as were Algy's.

One day he came in earlier than usual, and looking less serenely happy than his wont. Lord

Caterham, lying on his sofa, observed this, but said nothing, waiting until Algy should allude to it, as he was certain to do, for he had not the smallest power of reticence.

"Caterham, my dear old boy, how goes it this morning? I am seedy, my friend! The sage counsel given by the convivial bagman, that the evening's diversion should bear the morning's reflection, has not been followed by me. Does the cognac live in its usual corner, and is there yet soda-water in the land?"

"You'll find both in the sideboard, Algy. What were you doing last night to render them necessary?"

"Last night, my dear Caterham, I did what England expected me to do—my duty, and a most horrible nuisance that doing one's duty is. I dined with an old fellow named Huskisson, a friend of my governor's, who nearly poisoned me with bad wine. The wine, sir, was simply infamous; but it was a very hot night, and I was dreadfully thirsty, so what could I do but drink a great deal of it? I had some very fiery sherry with my

soup, and some hock. Yes; 'nor did my drooping memory shun the foaming grape of eastern France;' only this was the foaming gooseberry of Fulham Fields. And old Huskisson, with great pomp, told his butler to bring 'the Hermitage.' What an awful swindle!"

"What was it like?"

"Well, dear old boy, minds innocent and quiet may take that for a Hermitage if they like; but I who have drunk as much wine, good and bad, as most men, immediately recognised the familiar Beaujolais, which we get at the club for a shilling a pint. So that altogether I'm very nearly poisoned; and I think I shouldn't have come out if I had not wanted to see you particularly."

"What is it, Algy? Some of that tremendously important business which always takes up so much of your time?"

"No, no; now you're chaffing, Caterham. 'Pon my word I really do a great deal in the course of the day, walking about, and talking to fellows, and that sort of thing: there are very few

fellows who think what a lot I get through; but I know myself."

"Do you? then you've learned a great thing—'know thyself,' one of the great secrets of life;" and Caterham sighed.

"Yes, dear old boy," said Algy; "'know thyself, but never introduce a friend;' that I believe to be sterling philosophy. This is a confoundedly back-slapping age; every body is a deuced sight too fond of every body else; there is an amount of philanthropy about which is quite terrible."

"Yes, and you're about the largest-hearted and most genial philanthropist in the world; you know you are."

"I, dear old boy? I am Richard Crookback; I am the uncle of the Babes in the Wood; I am Timon the Tartar of Athens, or whatever his name was; I am a ruthless hater of all my species, when I have the *vin triste*, as I have this morning. O, that reminds me—the business I came to see you about. What a fellow you are, Caterham! always putting things out of fellows' heads!"

"Well, what is it now?"

"Why, old Ampthill is dead at last. Died last night; his man told my man this morning."

"Well, what then?"

"What then? Why, don't you recollect what we talked about? about his leaving his money to dear old Lionel?"

"Yes," said Caterham, looking grave, "I recollect that."

"I wonder whether any good came of it? It would be a tremendously jolly thing to get dear old Lionel back, with plenty of money, and in his old position, wouldn't it?"

"Look here, my dear Algy," said Lord Caterham; "let us understand each other once for all on this point. You and I are of course likely to differ materially on such a subject. You are a man of the world, going constantly into the world, with your own admirable good sense influenced by and impressed with the opinions of society. Society, as you tell me, is pleased to think my brother's—well, crime—there's no other word!—my brother's crime a venial one, and will be con-

tent to receive him back again, and to instal him in his former position, if he comes back prepared to sacrifice to Society by spending his time and money on it!"

"Pardon me, my dear old Caterham,—just two words!" interrupted Algy. "Society—people, you know, I mean—would shake their heads at poor old Lionel, and wouldn't have him back perhaps, and all that sort of thing, if they knew exactly what he'd done. But they don't. It's been kept wonderfully quiet, poor dear old fellow."

"That may or may not be; at all events, such are Society's views, are they not?" Barford inclined his head. "Now, you see, mine are entirely different. This sofa, the bed in the next room, that wheel-chair form my world; and these," pointing to his bookshelves, "my society. There is no one else on earth to whom I would say this; but you know that what I say is true. Lionel Brakespere never was a brother to me, never had the slightest affection or regard for me, never had the slightest patience with me. As a

boy, he used to mock at my deformity; as a man, he has perseveringly scorned me, and scarcely troubled himself to hide his anxiety for my death, that he might be Lord Beauport's heir—"

"Caterham! I say, my dear, dear old boy Arthur—" and Algy Barford put one hand on the back of Lord Caterham's chair, and rubbed his own eyes very hard with the other.

"You know it, Algy, old friend. He did all this; and God knows I tried to love him through it all, and think I succeeded. All his scorn, all his insult, all his want of affection, I forgave. When he committed the forgery which forced him to fly the country, I tried to intercede with my father; for I knew the awful strait to which Lionel must have been reduced before he committed such an act: but when I read his letter, which you brought me, and the contents of which it said you knew, I recognised at last that Lionel was a thoroughly heartless scoundrel, and I thanked God that there was no chance of his further disgracing our name in a place where it had been known and respected.

So you now see, Algy, why I am not enchanted at the idea of his coming back to us."

"Of course, of course, I understand you, dear fellow; and—hem!—confoundedly husky; that filthy wine of old Huskisson's! better in a minute —there!" and Algy cleared his throat and rubbed his eyes again. "About that letter, dear old boy! I was going to speak to you two or three times about that. Most mysterious circumstance, by Jove, sir! The fact is that—"

He was interrupted by the opening of the door and the entrance of Stephens, Lord Caterham's servant, who said that Lady Beauport would be glad to know if his master could receive her.

It was a bad day for Caterham to receive any one except his most intimate friends, and assuredly his mother was not included in that category. He was any thing but well bodily, and the conversation about Lionel had thoroughly unstrung his nerves; so that he was just about to say he must ask for a postponement of the visit, when Stephens said, "Her ladyship asked me if

Mr. Barford wasn't here, my lord, and seemed particular anxious to see him." Lord Caterham felt the colour flush in his cheeks as the cause of his mother's visit was thus innocently explained by Stephens; but the moment after he smiled, and sent to beg that she would come whenever she pleased.

In a very few minutes Lady Beauport sailed into the room, and, after shaking hands with Algy Barford in, for her, quite a cordial manner, she touched her son's forehead with her lips and dropped into the chair which Stephens had placed for her near the sofa.

"How are you, Arthur, to-day?" she commenced. "You are looking quite rosy and well, I declare. I am always obliged to come myself when I want to know about your health; for they bring me the most preposterous reports. That man of yours is a dreadful kill-joy, and seems to have inoculated the whole household with his melancholy, where you are concerned. Even Miss Maurice, who is really quite a cheerful person, and quite pleasant to have about one,

—equable spirits, and that sort of thing, you know, Mr. Barford; so much more agreeable than those moping creatures who are always thinking about their families and their fortunes, you know,—even Miss Maurice can scarcely be trusted for what I call a reliable report of Caterham."

"It's the interest we take in him, dear Lady Beauport, that keeps us constantly on the *qui vive.* He's such a tremendously lovable old fellow, that we're all specially careful about him;" and Algy's hand went round to the back of Caterham's sofa and his eyes glistened as before.

"Of course," said Lady Beauport, still in her hard dry voice. "With care every thing may be done. There's Alice Wentworth, Lady Broughton's granddaughter, was sent away in the autumn to Torquay, and they all declared she could not live. And I saw her last night at the French embassy, well and strong, and dancing away as hard as any girl in the room. It's a great pity you couldn't have gone to the

embassy last night, Arthur; you'd have enjoyed it very much."

"Do you think so, mother?" said Caterham with a sad smile. "I scarcely think it would have amused me, or that they would have cared much to have me there."

"O, I don't know; the Duchess de St. Lazare asked after you very kindly, and so did the Viscomte, who is—" and Lady Beauport stopped short.

"Yes, I know—who is a cripple also," said Caterham quietly. "But he is only lame; he can get about by himself. But if I had gone, I should have wanted Algy here to carry me on his back."

"Gad, dear old boy, if carrying you on my back would do you any good, or help you to get about to any place you wanted to go to, I'd do it fast enough; give you a regular Derby canter over any course you like to name."

"I know you would, Algy, old friend. You see every one is very kind, and I am doing very well indeed, though I'm scarcely in condi-

tion for a ball at the French embassy.—By the way, mother, did you not want to speak to Barford about something?"

"I did, indeed," said Lady Beauport. "I have heard just now, Mr. Barford, that old Mr. Ampthill died last night?"

"Perfectly true, Lady Beauport. I myself had the same information."

"But you heard nothing further?"

"Nothing at all, except that the poor old gentleman, after a curious eccentric life, made a quiet commonplace end, dying peacefully and happily."

"Yes, yes; but you heard nothing about the way in which his property is left, I suppose?"

"Not one syllable. He was very wealthy, was he not?"

"My husband says that the Boxwood property was worth from twelve to fifteen thousand a-year; but I imagine this is rather an under-estimate. I wonder whether there is any chance for—what I talked to you about the other day."

"Impossible to say, dear Lady Beauport,"

said Algy, with an awkward glance at Caterham, which Lady Beauport observed.

"O, you needn't mind Caterham one bit, Mr. Barford.—Any thing which would do good to poor Lionel I'm sure you'd be glad of, wouldn't you, Arthur?"

"Any thing that would do him good, yes."

"Of course; and to be Mr. Ampthill's heir would do him a great deal of good. It is that Mr. Barford and I are discussing. Mr. Barford was good enough to speak to me some time ago, when it was first expected that Mr. Ampthill's illness would prove dangerous, and to suggest that, as poor Lionel had always been a favourite with the old gentleman, something might be done for him, perhaps, there being so few relations. I spoke to your father, who called two or three times in Curzon Street, and always found Mr. Ampthill very civil and polite, but he never mentioned Lionel's name."

"That did not look particularly satisfactory, did it?" asked Algy.

"Well, it would have looked bad in any one

else; but with such an extremely eccentric person as Mr. Ampthill, I really cannot say I think so. He was just one of those oddities who would carefully refrain from mentioning the person about whom their thoughts were most occupied. —I cannot talk to your father about this matter, Arthur; he is so dreadfully set against poor Lionel, that he will not listen to a word.—But I need not tell you, Mr. Barford, I myself am horribly anxious."

Perfectly appreciating Lord Beauport's anger; conscious that it was fully shared by Caterham; with tender recollections of Lionel, whom he had known from childhood; and with a desire to say something pleasant to Lady Beauport, all Algy Barford could ejaculate was, "Of course, of course."

"I hear that old Mr. Trivett the lawyer was with him two or three times about a month ago, which looks as if he had been making his will. I met Mr. Trivett at the Dunsinanes in the autumn, and at Beauport's request was civil to him. I would not mind asking him to dine here one

day this week, if I thought it would be of any use."

Caterham looked very grave; but Algy Barford gave a great laugh, and seemed immensely amused. "How do you mean 'of any use,' Lady Beauport? You don't think you would get any information out of old Trivett, do you? He's the deadest hand at a secret in the world. He never lets out any thing. If you ask him what it is o'clock, you have to dig the information out of him with a ripping-chisel. O, no; it's not the smallest use trying to learn any thing from Mr. Trivett."

"Is there, then, no means of finding out what the will contains?"

"No, mother," interrupted Caterham; "none at all. You must wait until the will is read after the funeral; or perhaps, till you see a *résumé* of it in the illustrated papers."

"You are very odd, Arthur," said Lady Beauport; "really sometimes you would seem to have forgotten the usages of society.—I appeal to you, Mr. Barford. Is what Lord Caterham says cor-

rect? Is there no other way of learning what I want to know?"

"Dear Lady Beauport, I fear there is none."

"Very well, then; I must be patient and wait. But there's no harm in speculating how the money could be left. Who did Mr. Ampthill know now? There was Mrs. Macraw, widow of a dissenting minister, who used to read to him; and there was his physician, Sir Charles Dumfunk: I shouldn't wonder if he had a legacy."

"And there was Algernon Barford, commonly known as the Honourable Algernon Barford, who used to dine with the old gentleman half-a-dozen times every season, and who had the honour of being called a very good fellow by him."

"O, Algy, I hope he has left you his fortune," said Caterham warmly. "There's no one in the world would spend it to better purpose."

"Well," said Lady Beauport, "I will leave you now.—I know I may depend upon you, Mr. Barford, to give me the very first news on this important subject."

Algy Barford bowed, rose, and opened the door

to let Lady Beauport pass out. As she walked by him, she gave him a look which made him follow her and close the door behind him.

"I didn't like to say any thing before Caterham," she said, "who is, you know, very odd and queer, and seems to have taken quite a singular view of poor Lionel's conduct. But the fact is, that, after the last time you spoke to me, I—I thought it best to write to Lionel, to tell him that—" and she hesitated.

"To tell him what, Lady Beauport?" asked Algy, resolutely determined not to help her in the least.

"To tell him to come back to us—to me—to his mother!" said Lady Beauport with a sudden access of passion. "I cannot live any longer without my darling son! I have told Beauport this. What does it signify that he has been unfortunate—wicked if you will! How many others have been the same! And our influence could get him something somewhere, even if this inheritance should not be his. O my God! only to see him again! My darling boy! my own darling handsome boy!"

Ah, how many years since Gertrude, Countess of Beauport, had allowed real, natural, hot, blinding tears to course down her cheeks! The society people, who only knew her as the calmest, most collected, most imperious woman amongst them, would hardly recognise this palpitating frame, those tear-blurred features. The sight completely finishes Algy Barford, already very much upset by the news which Lady Beauport has communicated, and he can only proffer a seat, and suggest that he should fetch a glass of sherry. Lady Beauport, her burst of passion over, recovers all her usual dignity, presses Algy's hand, lays her finger on her lip to enjoin silence, and sails along as unbending as before. Algy Barford, still dazed by the tidings he has heard, goes back to Caterham's room, to find his friend lying with his eyes half-closed, meditating over the recent discussion. Caterham scarcely seemed to have noticed Algy's absence; for he said, as if in continuance of the conversation: "And do *you* think this money will come to Lionel, Algy?"

"I can scarcely tell, dear old boy. It's on the

cards, but the betting is heavily against it. However, we shall know in a very few days."

In a very few days they did know. The funeral, to which Earl Beauport and Algy Barford were invited, and which they attended, was over, and Mr. Trivett had requested them to return with him in the mourning-coach to Curzon Street. There, in the jolly little dining-room, which had so often enshrined the hospitality of the quaint, eccentric, warm-hearted old gentleman whose earthly remains they had left behind them at Kensal Green, after some cake and wine, old Mr. Trivett took from a blue bag, which had been left there for him by his clerk, the will of the deceased, and putting on his blue-steel spectacles, commenced reading it aloud. The executors appointed were George Earl Beauport and Algernon Barford, and to each of them was bequeathed a legacy of a thousand pounds. To Algernon Barford, "a good fellow, who, I know, will spend it like a gentleman," was also left a thousand pounds. There were legacies of five hundred pounds each "to

John Saunders, my faithful valet, and to Rebecca, his wife, my cook and housekeeper." There was a legacy of one hundred pounds to the librarian of the Minerva Club, "to whom I have given much trouble." The library of books, the statues, pictures, and curios were bequeathed to "my cousin Arthur, Viscount Caterham, the only member of my family who can appreciate them;" and "the entire residue of my fortune, my estate at Boxwood, money standing in the funds and other securities, plate, wines, carriages, horses, and all my property, to Anna, only daughter of my second cousin, the late Ralph Ampthill Maurice, Esq., formerly of the Priory, Willesden, whom I name my residuary legatee."

CHAPTER X.

LADY BEAUPORT'S PLOT.

YES; little Annie Maurice, Lady Beauport's companion, was the heiress of the rich and eccentric Mr. Ampthill, so long known in society. The fact was a grand thing for the paragraph-mongers and the diners-out, all of whom distorted it in every possible way, and told the most inconceivable lies about it. That Annie was Mr. Ampthill's natural daughter, and had been left on a door-step, and was adopted by Lady Beauport, who had found her in an orphan-asylum; that Mr. Ampthill had suddenly determined upon leaving all his property to the first person he might meet on a certain day, and that Annie Maurice was the fortunate individual; that the will had been made purposely to spite Lady Beauport, with whom Mr. Ampthill, when a young man, had been madly in love—all

these rumours went the round of the gossip-columns of the journals and of Society's dinner-parties. Other stories there were, perhaps a little nearer to truth, which explained that it was not until after Lionel Brakespere's last escapade he had been disinherited; indeed, that Parkinson of Thavies Inn and Scadgers of Berners Street had looked upon his inheritance as such a certainty, that they had made considerable advances on the strength of it, and would be heavily hit; while a rumour, traceable to the old gentleman's house-keeper, stated that Annie Maurice was the only one of Mr. Ampthill's connections who had never fawned on him, flattered him, or in any way in-trigued for his favour.

Be this as it might, the fact remained that Annie was now the possessor of a large fortune, and consequently a person of great importance to all her friends and acquaintance—a limited num-ber, but quite sufficient to discuss her rise in life with every kind of asperity. They wondered how she would bear it; whether she would give her-self airs; how soon, and to what member of the

peerage, she would be married. How *did* she bear it? When Lord Beauport sent for her to his study, after Mr. Ampthill's funeral, and told her what he had heard, she burst into tears; which was weak, but not unnatural. Then, with her usual straightforward common-sense, she set about forming her plans. She had never seen her benefactor, so that even Mrs. Grundy herself could scarcely have called on Annie to affect sorrow for his loss; and indeed remarks were made by Mr. Ampthill's old butler and housekeeper (who, being provided with mourning out of the estate, were as black and as shiny as a couple of old rooks) about the very mitigated grief which Annie chose to exhibit in her attire.

Then as to her mode of life. For the present, at least, she determined to make no change in it. She said so at once to Lord Beauport, expressing an earnest hope that she should be allowed to remain under his roof, where she had been so happy, until she had settled how and where she should live; and Lord Beauport replied that it would give him—and he was sure he might speak

for Lady Beauport—the greatest pleasure to have Miss Maurice with them. He brought a message to that effect from Lady Beauport, who had one of her dreadful neuralgic attacks, and could see no one, but who sent her kind love to Miss Maurice, and her heartiest congratulations, and hope that Miss Maurice would remain with them as long as she pleased. The servants of the house, who heard of the good fortune of "the young lady," rejoiced greatly at it, and suggested that miss would go hout of this at once, and leave my lady to grump about in that hold carriage by herself. They were greatly astonished, therefore, the next morning to find Annie seated at the nine-o'clock breakfast-table, preparing Lady Beauport's chocolate, and dressed just as usual. They had expected that the first sign of her independence would be lying in bed till noon, and then appearing in a gorgeous wrapper, such as the ladies in the penny romances always wore in the mornings; and they could only account for her conduct by supposing that she had to give a month's warning and must work out her time.

Lady Beauport herself was astonished when, the necessity for the neuralgic attack being over, she found Annie coming to ask her, as usual, what letters she required written, and whether she should pay any calls for her ladyship. Lady Beauport delicately remonstrated; but Annie declared that she would infinitely prefer doing exactly as she had been accustomed to, so long as she should remain in the house.

So long as she should remain in the house! That was exactly the point on which Lady Beauport was filled with hope and dread. Her ladyship had been cruelly disappointed in Mr. Ampthill's will. She had suffered herself to hope against hope, and to shut her eyes to all unfavourable symptoms. The old gentleman had taken so much notice of Lionel when a boy, had spoken so warmly of him, had made so much of him, that he could not fail to make him his heir. In vain had Lord Beauport spoken to her more plainly than was his wont, pointing out that Lionel's was no venial crime; that Mr. Ampthill probably had heard of it, inasmuch as he never

afterwards mentioned the young man's name; that however his son's position might be reinstated before the world, the act could never be forgotten. In vain Algy Barford shook his head, and Caterham preserved a gloomy silence worse than any speech. Lady Beauport's hopes did not desert her until she heard the actual and final announcement. Almost simultaneously with this came Lord Beauport with Annie's request that she should be permitted to continue an inmate of the house; and immediately Lady Beauport conceived and struck out a new plan of action. The heritage was lost to Lionel; but the heiress was Annie Maurice, a girl domiciled with them, clinging to them; unlikely, at least for the few ensuing months, to go into the world, to give the least chance to any designing fortune-hunter. And Lionel was coming home! His mother was certain that the letter which she had written to him on the first news of Mr. Ampthill's illness would induce him, already sick of exile, to start for England. He would arrive soon, and then the season would be over; they would all go away

to Homershams, or one of Beauport's places; they would not have any company for some time, and Lionel would be thrown into Annie Maurice's society; and it would be hard if he, with his handsome face, his fascinating manners, and his experience of women and the world, were not able to make an easy conquest of this simple quiet young girl, and thus to secure the fortune which his mother had originally expected for him.

Such was Lady Beauport's day-dream now, and to its realisation she gave up every thought, in reference to it she planned every action. It has already been stated that she had always treated Annie with respect, and even with regard: so that the idea of patronage, the notion of behaving to her companion in any thing but the spirit of a lady, had never entered her mind. But now there was an amount of affectionate interest mingled with her regard which Annie could not fail to perceive and to be gratified with. All was done in the most delicate manner. Lady Beauport never forgot the lady in the *intrigante;* her advances were of the subtlest kind; her hints were

given and allusions were made in the most guarded manner. She accepted Annie's assistance as her amanuensis, and she left to her the usual colloquies on domestic matters with the housekeeper, because she saw that Annie wished it to be so; and she still drove out with her in the carriage, only insisting that Annie should sit by her side instead of opposite on the back-seat. And instead of the dignified silence of the employer, only speaking when requiring an answer, Lady Beauport would keep up a perpetual conversation, constantly recurring to the satisfaction it gave her to have Annie still with her. "I declare I don't know what I should have done if you had left me, Annie!" she would say. "I'm sure it was the mere thought of having to be left by myself, or to the tender mercies of somebody who knew nothing about me, that gave me that last frightful attack of neuralgia. You see I am an old woman now; and though the Carringtons are proverbially strong and long-lived, yet I have lost all my elasticity of spirit, and feel I could not shape myself to any person's way now. And poor Caterham

too! I cannot think how he would ever get on without you. You seem now to be an essential part of his life. Poor Caterham! Ah, how I wish you had seen my other son, my boy Lionel! Such a splendid fellow; so handsome! Ah, Lord Beauport was dreadfully severe on him, poor fellow, that night,—you recollect, when he had you and Caterham in to tell you about poor Lionel; as though young men would not be always young men. Poor Lionel!" Poor Lionel! that was the text of Lady Beauport's discourse whenever she addressed herself to Annie Maurice.

It was not to be supposed that Annie's change of fortune had not a great effect upon Lord Caterham. When he first heard of it—from Algy Barford, who came direct to him from the reading of the will—he rejoiced that at least her future was secure; that, come what might to him or his parents, there would be a provision for her; that no chance of her being reduced to want, or of her having to consult the prejudices of other people, and to perform a kind of genteel servitude with any who could not appre-

ciate her worth could now arise. But with this feeling another soon mingled. Up to that time she had been all in all to him—to him; simply because to the outside world she was nobody, merely Lady Beauport's companion, about whom none troubled themselves; now she was Miss Maurice the heiress, and in a very different position. They could not hope to keep her to themselves; they could not hope to keep her free from the crowd of mercenary adorers always looking out for every woman with money whom they might devour. In her own common-sense lay her strongest safeguard; and that, although reliable on all ordinary occasions, had never been exposed to so severe a trial as flattery and success. Were not the schemers already plotting? even within the citadel was there not a traitor? Algy Barford had kept his trust, and had not betrayed one word of what Lady Beauport had told him; but from stray expressions dropped now and again, and from the general tenor of his mother's behaviour, Lord Caterham saw plainly what she was endeavour-

ing to bring about. On that subject his mind was made up. He had such thorough confidence in Annie's goodness, in her power of discrimination between right and wrong, that he felt certain that she could never bring herself to love his brother Lionel, however handsome his face, however specious his manner; but if, woman-like, she should give way and follow her inclination rather than her reason, then he determined to talk to her plainly and openly, and to do every thing in his power to prevent the result on which his mother had set her heart.

There was not a scrap of selfishness in all this. However deeply Arthur Caterham loved Annie Maurice, the hope of making her his had never for an instant arisen in his breast. He knew too well that a mysterious decree of Providence had shut him out from the roll of those who are loved by woman, save in pity or sympathy; and it was with a feeling of relief rather than regret, that of late—within the last few months—he had felt an inward presentiment that his commerce with Life was almost

at an end, that his connection with that Vanity Fair, through which he had been wheeled as a spectator, but in the occupation or amusement of which he had never participated, was about to cease. He loved her so dearly, that the thought of her future was always before him, and caused him infinite anxiety. Worst of all, there was no one of whom he could make a confidant amongst his acquaintance. Algy Barford would do any thing; but he was a bachelor, which would incapacitate him, and by far too easy-going, trouble-hating, and unimpressive. Who else was there? Ah, a good thought!—that man Ludlow, the artist; an old friend of Annie's, for whom she had so great a regard. He was not particularly strong-minded out of his profession; but his devotion to his child-friend was undoubted; and besides, he was a man of education and common-sense, rising, too, to a position which would insure his being heard. He would talk with Ludlow about Annie's future; so he wrote off to Geoffrey by the next post, begging him to come and see him as soon as possible.

Yes, he could look at it all quite steadily now. Heaven knows, life to him had been no such happiness as to make its surrender painful or difficult. It was only as he neared his journey's end, he thought, that any light had been shed upon his path, and when that should be extinguished he would have no heart to go further. No: let the end come, as he knew it was coming, swiftly and surely; only let him think that *her* future was secured, and he could die more than contented—happy.

Her future secured! ah, that he should not live to see! It could not, must not be by a marriage with Lionel. His mother had never broached that subject openly to him, and therefore he had hitherto felt a delicacy in alluding to it in conversation with her; but he would before—well, he would in time. Not that he had much fear of Annie's succumbing to his brother's fascinations; he rated her too highly for that. It was not—and he took up a photographic album which lay on his table, as the idea passed through his mind—it was not that

careless reckless expression, that easy insolent *pose*, which would have any effect on Annie Maurice's mental constitution. Those who imagine that women are enslaved through their eyes —true women—women worth winning at least —are horribly mistaken, he thought, and—And then at that instant he turned the page and came upon a photograph of himself, in which the artist had done his best so far as arrangement went, but which was so fatally truthful in its display of his deformity, that Lord Caterham closed the book with a shudder, and sunk back on his couch.

His painful reverie was broken by the entrance of Stephens, who announced that Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow were waiting to see his master. Caterham, who was unprepared for a visit from Mrs. Ludlow, gave orders that they should be at once admitted. Mrs. Ludlow came in leaning on her husband's arm, and looking so pale and interesting, that Caterham at once recollected the event he had seen announced in the *Times*, and began to apologise.

"My dear Mrs. Ludlow, what a horrible wretch I am to have asked your husband to come and see me, when of course he was fully occupied at home attending to you and the baby!" Then they both laughed; and Geoff said:

"This is her first day out, Lord Caterham; but I had promised to take her for a drive; and as you wanted to see me, I thought that—"

"That the air of St. Barnabas Square, the fresh breezes from the Thames, and the cheerful noise of the embankment-people, would be about the best thing for an invalid, eh?"

"Well—scarcely! but that as it was only stated that my wife should go for a quiet drive, I, who have neither the time nor the opportunity for such things, might utilise the occasion by complying with the request of a gentleman who has proved himself deserving of my respect."

"A hit! a very palpable hit, Mr. Ludlow!" said Caterham. "I bow, and—as the common phrase goes—am sorry I spoke. But we must not talk business when you have brought Mrs. Ludlow out for amusement."

"O, pray don't think of me, Lord Caterham," said Margaret; "I can always amuse myself."

"O, of course; the mere recollection of baby would keep you sufficiently employed—at least, so you would have us believe. But I'm an old bachelor, and discredit such things. So there's a book of photographs for you to amuse yourself with while we talk.—Now, Mr. Ludlow, for our conversation. Since we met, your old friend Annie Maurice has inherited a very large property."

"So I have heard to my great surprise and delight. But I live so much out of the world that I scarcely knew whether it was true, and had determined to ask you the first time I should see you."

"O, it's thoroughly true. She is the heiress of old Mr. Ampthill, who was a second cousin of her father's. But it was about her future career, as heiress of all this property, that I wanted to speak to you, you see.—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Ludlow, what did you say?"

Her face was dead white, her lips trembled,

and it was with great difficulty she said any thing at all; but she did gasp out, "Who is this?"

"That," said Lord Caterham, bending over the book; "O, that is the portrait of my younger brother, Lionel Brakespere; he—" but Caterham stopped short in his explanation, for Mrs. Ludlow fell backward in a swoon.

And every one afterwards said that it was very thoughtless of her to take such a long drive so soon after her confinement.

CHAPTER XI.

CONJECTURES.

Miss Maurice was not in the house when Geoffrey Ludlow and his wife made that visit to Lord Caterham which had so plainly manifested Margaret's imprudence and inexperience. The housekeeper and one of the housemaids had come to the assistance of the gentlemen, both equally alarmed, and one at least calculated to be, of all men living, the most helpless under the circumstances. Geoffrey was "awfully frightened," as he told her afterwards, when Margaret fainted.

"I shall never forget the whiteness of your face, my darling, and the dreadful sealed look of your eyelids. I thought in a moment that was how you would look if you were dead; and what should I do if I ever had to see *that* sight!"

This loving speech Geoffrey made to his wife

as they drove homewards,—she pale, silent, and coldly abstracted; he full of tender anxiety for her comfort and apprehension for her health,—sentiments which rendered him, to say the truth, rather a trying companion in a carriage; for he was constantly pulling the glasses up and down, fixing them a button-hole higher or lower, rearranging the blinds, and giving the coachman contradictory orders. These proceedings were productive of no apparent annoyance to Margaret, who lay back against the cushions with eyes open and moody, and her underlip caught beneath her teeth. She maintained unbroken silence until they reached home, and then briefly telling Geoffrey that she was going to her room to lie down, she left him.

"She's not strong," said Geoffrey, as he proceeded to disembarrass himself of his outdoor attire, and to don his "working-clothes,"—"she's not strong; and it's very odd she's not more cheerful. I thought the child would have made it all right; but perhaps it will when she's stronger." And Geoff sighed as he went to his work, and sighed again once or twice as he pursued it.

Meanwhile Lord Caterham was thinking over the startling incident which had just occurred. He was an observant man naturally, and the enforced inaction of his life had increased this tendency; while his long and deep experience of physical suffering and weakness had rendered him acutely alive to any manifestations of a similar kind in other people. Mrs. Ludlow's fainting-fit puzzled him. She had been looking so remarkably well when she came in; there had been nothing feverish, nothing suggestive of fictitious strength or over-exertion in her appearance; no feebleness in her manner or languor in the tone of her voice. The suddenness and completeness of the swoon were strange,—were so much beyond the ordinary faintness which a drive undertaken a little too soon might be supposed to produce,—and the expression of Margaret's face, when she had recovered her consciousness, was so remarkable, that Lord Caterham felt instinctively the true origin of her illness had not been that assigned to it.

"She looked half-a-dozen years older," he thought: "and the few words she said were

spoken as if she were in a dream. I must be more mistaken than I have ever been, or there is something very wrong about that woman. And what a good fellow he is!—what a simple-hearted blundering kind fellow! How wonderful his blindness is! I saw in a moment how he loved her, how utterly uninterested she is in him and his affairs. I hope there may be nothing worse than lack of interest; but I am afraid, very much afraid for Ludlow."

And then Lord Caterham's thoughts wandered away from the artist and his beautiful wife to that other subject which occupied them so constantly, and with which every other cogitation or contemplation contrived to mingle itself in an unaccountable manner, on which he did not care to reason, and against which he did not attempt to strive. What did it matter now? He might be ever so much engrossed, and no effort at self-control or self-conquest would be called for; the feelings he cherished unchecked could not harm any one—could not harm himself now. There was great relief, great peace in that thought,—no strife for

him to enter on, no struggle in which his suffering body and weary mind must engage. The end would be soon with him now; and while he waited for it, he might love this bright young girl with all the power of his heart.

So Lord Caterham lay quite still upon the couch on which they had placed Margaret when she fainted, and thought over all he had intended to say to Geoffrey, and must now seek another opportunity of saying, and turned over in his mind sundry difficulties which he began to foresee in the way of his cherished plan, and which would probably arise in the direction of Mrs. Ludlow. Annie and Margaret had not hitherto seen much of each other, as has already appeared; and there was something ominous in the occurrence of that morning which troubled Lord Caterham's mind and disturbed his preconcerted arrangements. If trouble—trouble of some unknown kind, but, as he intuitively felt, of a serious nature—were hanging over Geoffrey Ludlow's head, what was to become of his guardianship of Annie in the future, —that future which Lord Caterham felt was

drawing so near; that future which would find her without a friend, and would leave her exposed to countless flatterers. He was pondering upon these things when Annie entered the room, bright and blooming, after her drive in the balmy summer air, and carrying a gorgeous bouquet of crimson roses.

She was followed by Stephens, carrying two tall Venetian glasses. He placed them on a table, and then withdrew.

"Look, Arthur," said Annie; "we've been to Fulham, and I got these fresh cut, all for your own self, at the nursery-gardens. None of those horrid formal tied-up bouquets for you, or for me either, with the buds stuck on with wires, and nasty fluffy bits of cotton sticking to the leaves. I went round with the man, and made him cut each rose as I pointed it out; and they're such beauties, Arthur! Here's one for you to wear and smell and spoil; but the others I'm going to keep fresh for ever so long."

She went over to the couch and gave him the rose, a rich crimson full-formed flower, gorgeous

in colour and exquisite in perfume. He took it with a smile and held it in his hand.

"Why don't you put it in your button-hole, Lord Caterham?" said Annie, with a pretty air of pettishness which became her well.

"Why?" said Lord Caterham. "Do you think I am exactly the style of man to wear posies and breast-knots, little Annie?" His tone was sad through its playfulness.

"Nonsense, Arthur," she began; "you—" Then she looked at him, and stopped suddenly, and her face changed. "Have you been worse to-day? You look very pale. Have you been in pain? Did you want me?"

"No, no, my child," said Lord Caterham; "I am just as usual. Go on with your flowers, Annie,—settle them up, lest they fade. They are beautiful indeed, and we'll keep them as long as we can."

She was not reassured, and she still stood and gazed earnestly at him.

"I am all right, Annie,—I am indeed. My head is even easier than usual. But some one has

been ill, if I haven't. Your friends the Ludlows were here to-day. Did no one tell you as you came in ?"

"No, I did not see any one; I left my bonnet in the ante-room and came straight in here. I only called to Stephens to bring the flower-glasses. Was Mrs. Ludlow ill, Arthur? Did she come to see me?"

"I don't think so—she only came, I think, because I wanted to see Ludlow, and he took advantage of the circumstance to have a drive with her. Have you seen her since the child was born?"

"No, I called, but only to inquire. But was she ill? What happened?"

"Well, she was ill—she fainted. Ludlow and I were just beginning to talk, and, at her own request, leaving her to amuse herself with the photographs and things lying about—and she had just asked me some trifling question, something about Lionel's portrait—whose it was, I think—when she suddenly fainted. I don't think there could be a more complete swoon; she really looked as though she were dead."

"What did you do? was Geoffrey frightened?"

"Yes, we were both frightened. Stephens came, and two of the women. Ludlow was terrified; but she soon recovered, and she would persist in going home, though I tried to persuade her to wait until you returned. But she would not listen to it, and went away with Ludlow in a dreadful state of mind; he thinks he made her take the drive too soon, and is frightfully penitent."

"Well but, Arthur," said Annie, seriously and anxiously, "I suppose he did. It must have been that which knocked her up. She has no mother or sister with her, you know, to tell her about these things."

"My dear Annie," said Lord Caterham, "she has a doctor and a nurse, I suppose; and she has common-sense, and knows how she feels, herself—does she not? She looked perfectly well when she came in, and handsomer than when I saw her before—and I don't believe the drive had any thing to do with the fainting-fit."

Miss Maurice looked at Lord Caterham in great surprise. His manner and tone were serious, and

her feelings, easily roused when her old friend was concerned, were excited now to apprehension. She left off arranging the roses; she dried her finger-tips on her handkerchief, and placing a chair close beside Caterham's couch, she sat down and asked him anxiously to explain his meaning.

"I can't do that very well, Annie," he said, "for I am not certain of what it is; but of this I am certain, my first impression of Mrs. Ludlow is correct. There is something wrong about her, and Ludlow is ignorant of it. All I said to you that day, is more fully confirmed in my mind now. There is some dark secret in the past of her life, and the secret in the present is, that she lives in that past, and does not love her husband."

"Poor Geoffrey," said Annie, in whose eyes tears were standing—"poor Geoffrey, and how dearly he loves her!"

"Yes," said Lord Caterham, "that's the worst of it; that, and his unsuspiciousness,—he does not see what the most casual visitor to their house sees; he does not perceive the weariness of spirit that is the first thing, next to her beauty, which

every one with common perception must recognise. She takes no pains—she does not make the least attempt to hide it. Why, to-day, when she recovered, when her eyes opened—such gloomy eyes they were!—and Ludlow was kneeling here,"—he pointed down beside the couch he lay on—"bending over her,—did she look up at him?—did she meet the gaze fixed on her and smile, or try to smile, to comfort and reassure him? Not she: I was watching her; she just opened her eyes and let them wander round, turned her head from him, and let it fall against the side of the couch as if she never cared to lift it more."

"Poor Geoffrey!" said Annie again; this time with a sob.

"Yes, indeed, Annie," he went on; "I pity him, as much as I mistrust her. He has never told you any thing about her antecedents, has he?—and I suppose she has not been more communicative?"

"No," replied Annie; "I know nothing more than I have told you. She has always been the same when I have seen her—trying, I thought,

to seem and be happier than at first, but very languid still. Geoffrey said sometimes that she was rather out of spirits, but he seemed to think it was only delicate health—and I hoped so too, though I could not help fearing you were right in all you said that day. O, Arthur, isn't it hard to think of Geoffrey loving her so much, and working so hard, and getting so poor a return?"

"It is indeed, Annie," said Lord Caterham, with a strange wistful look at her; "it is very hard. But I fear there are harder things than that in store for Ludlow. He is not conscious of the extent of his misfortune, if even he knows of its existence at all. I fear the time is coming when he must know all there is to be known, whatever it may be. That woman has a terrible secret in her life, Annie, and the desperate weariness within her—how she let it show when she was recovering from the swoon! —will force it into the light of day before long. Her dreary quietude is the calm before the storm."

"I suppose I had better write this evening and inquire for her," said Annie, after a pause; "and propose to call on her. It will gratify Geoffrey."

"Do so," said Lord Caterham; "I will write to Ludlow myself."

Annie wrote her kind little letter, and duly received a reply. Mrs. Ludlow was much better, but still rather weak, and did not feel quite able to receive Miss Maurice's kindly-proffered visit just at present.

"I am very glad indeed of that, Annie," said Lord Caterham, to whom she showed the note; "you cannot possibly do Ludlow any good, my child; and something tells me that the less you see of her the better."

For some days following that on which the incident and the conversation just recorded took place, Lord Caterham was unable to make his intended request to Geoffrey Ludlow that the latter would call upon him, that they might renew their interrupted conversation. One of those crises in the long struggle which he maintained with disease and pain, in which entire prostration produced a kind of truce, had come upon him; and silence, complete inaction, and almost a suspension of his

faculties, marked its duration. The few members of the household who had access to him were familiar with this phase of his condition; and on this occasion it attracted no more notice than usual, except from Annie, who remarked additional gravity in the manner of the physician, and who perceived that the state of exhaustion of the patient lasted longer, and when he rallied was succeeded by less complete restoration to even his customary condition than before. She mentioned these results of her close observation to Lady Beauport; but the countess paid very little attention to the matter, assuring Annie that she knew Caterham much too well to be frightened; that he would do very well if there were no particular fuss made about him; and that all doctors were alarmists, and said dreadful things to increase their own importance. Annie would have called her attention to the extenuating circumstance that Lord Caterham's medical attendant had not said any thing at all, and that she had merely interpreted his looks; but Lady Beauport was so anxious to tell her something illustrative of "poor Lionel's" beauty, grace,

daring, or dash—no matter which or what—that Annie found it impossible to get in another word.

A day or two later, when Lord Caterham had rallied a good deal, and was able to listen to Annie as she read to him, and while she was so engaged, and he was looking at her with the concentrated earnestness she remarked so frequently in his gaze of late,—Algy Barford was announced. Algy had been constantly at the house to inquire for Lord Caterham; but to-day Stephens had felt sure his master would be able and glad to see Algy. Every body liked that genial soul, and servants in particular—a wonderful test of popularity and its desert. He came in very quietly, and he and Annie exchanged greetings cordially. She liked him also. After he had spoken cheerily to Caterham, and called him "dear old boy" at least a dozen times in as many sentences, the conversation was chiefly maintained between him and Miss Maurice. She did not think much talking would do for Arthur just then, and she made no movement towards leaving the room, as was her usual custom. Algy was a little subdued in tone

and spirits: it was impossible even to him to avoid seeing that Caterham was looking much more worn and pale than usual; and he was a bad hand at disguising a painful impression, so that he was less fluent and discursive than was his wont, and decidedly ill at ease.

"How is your painting getting on, Miss Maurice?" he said, when a pause became portentous.

"She has been neglecting it in my favour," said Lord Caterham. "She has not even finished the portrait you admired so much, Algy."

"O!—ah!—'The Muse of Painting,' wasn't it? It is a pity not to finish it, Miss Maurice. I think you would never succeed better than in that case,—you admire the original so much."

"Yes," said Annie, with rather an uneasy glance towards Caterham, "she is really beautiful. Arthur thinks her quite as wonderful as I do; but I have not seen her lately—she has been ill. By the bye, Arthur, Geoffrey Ludlow wrote to me yesterday inquiring for you; and only think what he says!—'I hope my wife's illness did not upset Lord Caterham; but I am afraid it did.'" Annie

had taken a note from the pocket of her apron, and read these words in a laughing voice.

"Hopes his wife's illness did not upset Lord Caterham!" repeated Algy Barford in a tone of whimsical amazement. "What may that mean, dear old boy? Why are you supposed to be upset by the peerless lady of the unspeakable eyes and the unapproachable hair?"

Annie laughed, and Caterham smiled as he replied, "Only because Mrs. Ludlow fainted here in this room very suddenly, and very 'dead,' one day lately; and as Mrs. Ludlow's fainting was a terrible shock to Ludlow, he concludes that it was also a terrible shock to me,—that's all."

"Well, but," said Algy, apparently seized with an unaccountable access of curiosity, "why did Mrs. Ludlow faint? and what brought her here to faint in your room?"

"It was inconsiderate, I confess," said Caterham, still smiling; "but I don't think she meant it. The fact is, I had asked Ludlow to come and see me; and he brought his wife; and—and she has not been well, and the drive was too much

for her, I suppose. At all events, Ludlow and I were talking, and not minding her particularly, when she said something to me, and I turned round and saw her looking deadly pale, and before I could answer her she fainted."

"Right off?" asked Algy, with an expression of dismay so ludicrous that Annie could not resist it, and laughed outright.

"Right off, indeed," answered Caterham; "down went the photograph-book on the floor, and down she would have gone if Ludlow had been a second later, or an inch farther away! Yes; it was a desperate case, I assure you. How glad you must feel that you wer'n't here, Algy,—eh? What would you have done now? Resorted to the bellows, like the Artful Dodger, or twisted her thumbs, according to the famous prescription of Mrs. Gamp?"

But Algy did not laugh, much to Lord Caterham's amusement, who believed him to be overwhelmed by the horrid picture his imagination conjured up of the position of the two gentlemen under the circumstances.

"But," said Algy, with perfect gravity, "why did she faint? What did she say? People don't tumble down in a dead faint because they're a little tired, dear old boy—do they?"

"Perhaps not in general, Algy, but it looks like it in Mrs. Ludlow's case. All I can tell you is, that the faint was perfectly genuine and particularly 'dead,' and that there was no cause for it, beyond the drive and the fatigue of looking over the photographs in that book. I am very tired of photographs myself, and I suppose most people are the same, but I haven't quite come to fainting over them yet."

Algy Barford's stupefaction had quite a rousing effect on Lord Caterham, and Annie Maurice liked him and his odd ways more than ever. He made some trifling remark in reply to Caterham's speech, and took an early opportunity of minutely inspecting the photograph-book which he had mentioned.

"So," said Algy to himself, as he walked slowly down St. Barnabas Square; "she goes to see Caterham, and faints at sight of dear old

Lionel's portrait, does she? Ah, it's all coming out, Algy; and the best thing you can do, on the whole, is to keep your own counsel,—that's about it, dear old boy!"

CHAPTER XII.

GATHERING CLOUDS.

"My younger brother Lionel Brakespere;" those were Lord Caterham's words. Margaret had heard them distinctly before consciousness left her; there was no mistake, no confusion in her mind,—"my younger brother Lionel Brakespere." All unconsciously, then, she had been for months acquainted and in occasional communication with *his* nearest relatives! Only that day she had been in the house where he had lived; had sat in a room all the associations of which were doubtless familiar to him; had gazed upon the portrait of that face for the sight of which her heart yearned with such a desperate restless longing!

Lord Caterham's brother! Brother to that poor sickly cripple, in whom life's flame seemed not to shine, but to flicker merely,—her Lionel,

so bright and active and handsome! Son of that proud, haughty Lady Beauport—yes, she could understand that; it was from his mother that he inherited the cool bearing, the easy assurance, the never-absent *hauteur* which rendered him conspicuous even in a set of men where all these qualities were prized and imitated. She had not had the smallest suspicion the name she had known him by was assumed, or that he had an earl for his father and a viscount for his brother. He had been accustomed to speak of "the governor—a good old boy;" but his mother and his brother he never mentioned.

They knew him there, knew him as she had never known him—free, unrestrained, without that mask which, to a certain extent, he had necessarily worn in her presence. In his intercourse with them he had been untrammelled, with no lurking fear of what might happen some day; no dodging demon at his side suggesting the end, the separation that he knew must unavoidably come. And she had sat by, ignorant of all that was consuming their hearts' cores,

which, had she been able to discuss it with them, would have proved to be her own deepest, most cherished, most pertinacious source of thought. They?—who were they? How many of them had known her Lionel?—how many of them had cared for him? Lady Beauport and Lord Caterham, of course—but of the others? Geoffrey himself had never known him. No; thank God for that! The comparison between her old lover and her husband which she had so often drawn in her own mind had never, could never have occurred to him. Geoffrey's only connection with the Beauport family had been through Annie Maurice. Ah! Annie Maurice!—the heiress now, whose sudden acquisition of wealth and position they were all talking of,—she had not seen Lionel in the old days; and even if she had, it had been slight matter. But Margaret's knowledge of the world was wide and ample, and it needed very little experience—far less indeed than she had had—to show her what might have been the effect had those two met under the existent different circumstances.

For Margaret knew Lionel Brakespere, and read him like a book. All her wild infatuation about him,—and her infatuation about him was wilder, madder than it had ever been before,—all the length of time since she lost him,—all the long, weary, deadening separation, had not had the smallest effect on her calm matured judgment. She knew that he was at heart a scoundrel; she knew that he had no stability of heart, no depth of affection. Had not her own experience of him taught her that? had not the easy, indifferent, heartless way in which he had slipped out of her knotted arms, leaving her to pine and fret and die, for all he cared, shown her that? She had a thorough appreciation of his worship of the rising sun,—she knew how perfectly he would have sold himself for wealth and position; and yet she loved him, loved him through all!

This was her one consolation in the thought of his absence—his exile. Had he been in England, how readily would he have fallen into those machinations which she guessed his mother would

have been only too ready to plot! She knew he was thousands of miles away; and the thought that she was freed from rivalry in a great measure reconciled her to his absence. She could hold him in her heart of hearts as her own only love; there was no one, in her thoughts, to dispute her power over him. He was hers,—hers alone. And he had obtained an additional interest in her eyes since she had discovered his identity. Now she would cultivate that acquaintance with his people,—all unknowingly she should be able to ally herself more closely to him. Casual questions would bring direct answers—all bearing on the topic nearest her heart: without in the smallest degree betraying her own secret, she would be able to feed her own love-flame, —to hear of, to talk of him for whom every pulse of her heart throbbed and yearned.

Did it never occur to her to catechise that heart, to endeavour to portray vividly to herself the abyss on the brink of which she was standing,—to ask herself whether she was prepared to abnegate all sense of gratitude and duty, and

to persevere in the course which—not recklessly, not in a moment of passion, but calmly and unswervingly—she had begun to tread? Yes; she had catechised herself often, had ruthlessly probed her own heart, had acknowledged her baseness and ingratitude, yet had found it impossible to struggle against the pervading thrall. Worse than all, the sight of the man to whom she owed every thing—comfort, respectability, almost life itself,—the sight of him patiently labouring for her sake had become oppressive to her; from calmly suffering it, she had come to loathe and rebel against it. Ah, what a contrast between the present dull, dreary, weary round and the bright old days of the past! To her, and to her alone, was the time then dedicated. She would not then have been left to sit alone, occupying her time as best she might, but every instant would have been devoted to her; and let come what might on the morrow, that time would have been spent in gaiety.

Was there no element of rest in the new era of her life? Did not the child which lay upon her bosom bring some alleviating influence, some new

sphere for the absorption of her energies, some new hope, in the indulgence in which she might have found at least temporary forgetfulness of self? Alas, none! She had accepted her maternity as she had accepted her wifehood,—calmly, quietly, without even a pretence of that delicious folly, that pardonable self-satisfaction, that silly, lovable, incontrovertible, charming pride which nearly always accompanies the first experience of motherhood. Old Geoff was mad about his first-born—would leave his easel and come crooning and peering up into the nursery,—would enter that sacred domain in a half-sheepish manner, as though acknowledging his intrusion, but on the score of parental love hoping for forgiveness,—would say a few words of politeness to the nurse, who, inexorable to most men, was won over by his genuine devotion and his evident humility,—would take up the precious bundle, at length confided to him, in the awkwardest manner, and would sit chirrupping to the little putty face, or swing the shapeless mass to and fro, singing meanwhile the dismallest of apparently Indian dirges, and all the while be experiencing

the most acute enjoyment. Geoff was by nature a heavy sleeper; but the slightest cry of the child in the adjoining chamber would rouse him; the inevitable infantile maladies expressed in the inevitable peevish whine, so marvellously imitated by the toy-baby manufacturers, would fill him with horror and fright, causing him to lie awake in an agony of suspense, resting on his elbow and listening with nervous anxiety for their cessation or their increase; while Margaret, wearied out in mental anxiety, either slept tranquilly by his side or remained awake, her eyes closed, her mind abstracted from all that was going on around her, painfully occupied with retrospect of the past or anticipation of the future. She did not care for her baby? No—plainly no! She accepted its existence as she had accepted the other necessary corollaries of her marriage; but the grand secret of maternal love was as far removed from her as though she had never suffered her travail and brought a man-child into the world. That she would do her duty by her baby she had determined,—much in the same spirit that she had

decided upon the strict performance of her conjugal duty; but no question of love influenced her. She did not dislike the child,—she was willing to give herself up to the inconveniences which its nurture, its care, its necessities occasioned her; but that was all.

If Margaret did not "make a fuss" with the child, there were plenty who did; numberless people to come and call; numberless eyes to watch all that happened,—to note the *insouciance* which existed, instead of the solicitude which should have prevailed; numberless tongues to talk and chatter and gossip,—to express wonderment, to declare that their owners "had never seen the like," and so on. Little Dr. Brandram found it more difficult than ever to get away from his lady-patients. After all their own disorders had been discussed and remedies suggested, the conversation was immediately turned to his patient at Elm Lodge; and the little medico had to endure and answer a sharp fire of questions of all kinds. Was it really a fine child? and was it true that Mrs. Ludlow did not care about it? She was

nursing it herself; yes: that proved nothing; every decent woman would do that, rather than have one of those dreadful creatures in the house —pints of porter every hour, and doing nothing but sit down and abuse every one, and wanting so much waiting on, as though they were duchesses. But *was* it true? Now, doctor, you must know all these stories about her not caring for the child? Caring!—well, you ought to know, with all your experience, what the phrase meant. People would talk, you know, and that was what they said; and all the doctor's other patients wanted to know was whether it was really true. He did his best, the little doctor—for he was a kindly-hearted little creature, and Margaret's beauty had had its usual effect upon him,—he did his best to endow the facts with a roseate hue; but he had a hard struggle, and only partially succeeded. If there was one thing on which the ladies of Lowbar prided themselves, it was on their fulfilment of their maternal duties; if there was one bond of union between them, it was a sort of tacitly-recognised consent to talk of and listen to each other's discussion of

their children, either in existence or in prospect. It was noticed now that Margaret had always shirked this inviting subject; and it was generally agreed that it was no wonder, since common report averred that she had no pride in her first-born. A healthy child too, according to Dr. Brandram—a fine healthy well-formed child. Why, even poor Mrs. Ricketts, whose baby had spinal complaint, loved it, and made the most of it; and Mrs. Moule, whose little Sarah had been blind from her birth, thought her offspring unmatchable in the village, and nursed and tended it night and day. No wonder that in a colony where these sentiments prevailed, Margaret's reputation, hardly won, was speedily on the decline. It may be easily imagined too that to old Mrs. Ludlow's observant eyes Margaret's want of affection for her child did not pass unnoticed. By no one was the child's advent into the world more anxiously expected than by its grandmother, who indeed looked forward to deriving an increased social status from the event, and who had already discussed it with her most intimate friends. Mrs. Ludlow had been prepared

for a great contest for supremacy when the child was born—a period at which she intended to assert her right of taking possession of her son's house and remaining its mistress until her daughter-in-law was able to resume her position. She had expected that in this act she would have received all the passive opposition of which Margaret was capable—opposition with which Geoff, being indoctrinated, might have been in a great measure successful. But, to her intense surprise, no opposition was made. Margaret received the announcement of Mrs. Ludlow's intended visit and Mrs. Ludlow's actual arrival with perfect unconcern; and after her baby had been born, and she had bestowed on it a very calm kiss, she suffered it to be removed by her mother-in-law with an expression which told even more of satisfaction than resignation. This behaviour was so far different from any thing Mrs. Ludlow had expected, that the old lady did not know what to make of it; and her daughter-in-law's subsequent conduct increased her astonishment. This astonishment she at first tried to keep to herself; but that was impossible. The feeling

gradually vented itself in sniffs and starts, in eye-brow-upliftings for the edification of the nurse, in suggestive exclamations of "Well, my dear?" and "Don't you think, my love?" and such old-lady phraseology. Further than these little ebullitions Mrs. Ludlow made no sign until her daughter came to see her; and then she could no longer contain herself, but spoke out roundly.

"What it is, my dear, I can't tell for the life of me; but there's something the matter with Margaret. She takes no more notice of the child than if it were a chair or a table;—just a kiss, and how do you do? and nothing more."

"It's because this is her first child, mother. She's strange to it, you know, and—"

"Strange to it, my dear! Nonsense! Nothing of the sort. You're a young girl, and can't understand these things. But not only that,—one would think, at such a time, she would be more than ever fond of her husband. I'm sure when Geoff was born I put up with more from your father than ever I did before or since. His 'gander-month,' he called it; and he used to go gan-

dering about with a parcel of fellows, and come home at all hours of the night—I used to hear him, though he did creep upstairs with his boots off—but he never had a cross word or look from me."

"Well, but surely, mother, Geoff has not had either cross words or cross looks from Margaret?"

"How provoking you are, Matilda! That seems to be my fate, that no one can understand me. I never said he had, did I? though it would be a good thing for him if he had, poor fellow, I should say—any thing better than what he has to endure now."

"Don't be angry at my worrying you, dear mother; but for Heaven's sake tell me what you mean—what Geoff has to endure?"

"I am not angry, Til; though it seems to be my luck to be imagined angry when there's nothing further from my thoughts. I'm not angry, my dear—not in the least."

"What about Geoff, mother?"

"O, my dear, that's enough to make one's blood boil! I've never said a word to you before

about this, Matilda—being one of those persons who keep pretty much to themselves, though I see a great deal more than people think for,—I've never said a word to you before about this; for, as I said to myself, what good could it do? But I'm perfectly certain that there's something wrong with Margaret."

"How do you mean, mother? Something wrong!—is she ill?"

"Now, my dear Matilda, as though a woman would be likely to be well when she's just had—— Bless my soul, the young women of the present day are very silly! I wasn't speaking of her health, of course."

"Of what then, mother?" said Til, with resignation.

"Well, then, my dear, haven't you noticed,—but I suppose not: no one appears to notice these things in the way that I do,—but you might have noticed that for the last few weeks Margaret has seemed full of thought, dreamy, and not caring for any thing that went on. If I've pointed out once to her about the mite of a cap that that Harriet

wears, and all her hair flying about her ears, and a crinoline as wide as wide, I've spoken a dozen times; but she's taken no notice; and now the girl sets me at defiance, and tells me I'm not her mistress, and never shall be! That's one thing; but there are plenty of others. I was sure Geoffrey's linen could not be properly aired—the colds he caught were so awful; and I spoke to Margaret about it, but she took no notice; and yesterday, when the clothes came home from the laundress, I felt them myself, and you might have wrung the water out of them in pints. There are many other little things too that I've noticed; and I'll tell you what it is, Matilda—I'm certain she has got something on her mind."

"O, I hope not, poor girl, poor dear Margaret!"

"Poor dear fiddlestick! What nonsense you talk, Matilda! If there's any one to be pitied, it's Geoffrey, I should say; though what he could have expected, taking a girl for his wife that he'd known so little of, and not having any wedding-breakfast, or any thing regular, I don't know!"

"But why is Geoffrey to be pitied, mother?"

"Why? Why, because his wife doesn't love him, my dear! Now you know it!"

"O, mother, for Heaven's sake don't say such a thing! You know you're—you won't mind what I say, dearest mother,—but you're a little apt to jump at conclusions, and—"

"O yes, I know, my dear; I know I'm a perfect fool!—I know that well enough; and if I don't, it's not for want of being reminded of it by my own daughter. But I know I'm right in what I say; and what's more, my son shall know it before long."

"O, mother, you would never tell Geoff!—you would never—"

"If a man's eyes are not open naturally, my dear, they must be opened for him. I shall tell Geoffrey my opinion about his wife; and let him know it in pretty plain terms, I can tell you!"

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. STOMPFF'S DOUBTS.

It is not to be supposed that because Geoffrey Ludlow's married life offered no very striking points for criticism, it was left uncriticised by his friends. Those, be they married or single, quiet or boisterous, convivial or misanthropical, who do not receive discussion at the hands of their acquaintance, are very few in number. There can be nothing more charmingly delightful, nothing more characteristic of this chivalrous age, than the manner in which friends speak of each other behind, as the phrase goes, "each other's backs." To two sets of people, having a third for common acquaintance, this pastime affords almost inexpressible delight, more especially if the two sets present have been made acquainted with each other through the medium of the absent

third. It is rather dangerous ground at first, because neither of the two sets present can tell whether the other may not have some absurd scruples as to the propriety of canvassing the merits or demerits of their absent friend; but a little tact, a little cautious dealing with the subject, a few advances made as tentatively as those of the elephant on the timber-bridge, soon show that the discussion will not be merely endured, but will be heartily welcome; and straightway it is plunged into with the deepest interest. How they manage to keep that carriage,—that's what we've always wanted to know! O, you've noticed it too. Well, is it rouge or enamel, or what? That's what I've always said to George —how that poor man can go on slaving and slaving as he does, and all the money going in finery for her, is what I can't understand! What a compliment to our opinion of our powers of character-reading to find all our notions indorsed by others, more especially when those notions have been derogatory to those with whom we have for some time been living on terms of inti-

macy! To be sure there is another side to the medal, when we find that those who have known our dear absents a much shorter time than we have, claim credit for being far more sharpsighted than we. They marked at once, they say, all the shortcomings which we had taken so long to discover; and they lead the chorus of depreciation, in which we only take inferior parts.

It was not often that Mr. Stompff busied himself with the domestic concerns of the artists who formed his staff. It was generally quite enough for him provided they "came up to time," as he called it, did their work well, and did not want too much money in advance. But in Geoffrey Ludlow Mr. Stompff took a special interest, regarding him as a man out of whom, if properly worked, great profit and fame were to be made. He had paid several visits to Elm Lodge, ostensibly for the purpose of seeing how the Brighton-Esplanade picture was progressing; but with this he combined the opportunity of inspecting the domestic arrangements, and noting whether they were such as were likely to "suit

his book." No man more readily understood the dispiriting influence of a slattern wife or a disorderly home upon the work that was to be done.

"I've seen 'em," he used to say, "chock-full of promise, and all go to the bad just because of cold meat for dinner, or the house full of steam on washing-days. They'd rush away, and go off—public-house or any where—and then good-bye to my work and the money they've had of me! What I like best 's a regular expensive woman,—fond of her dress and going about, and all that,—who makes a man stick to it to keep her going. That's when you get the work out of a cove. So I'll just look-up Ludlow, and see how he's goin' on."

He did "look-up" Ludlow several times; and his sharp eyes soon discovered a great deal of which he did not approve, and which did not seem likely to coincide with his notions of business. He had taken a dislike to Margaret the first time he had seen her, and his dislike increased on each subsequent visit. There was something about her which he could scarcely ex-

plain to himself,—a "cold stand-offishness," he phrased it,—which he hated. Margaret thought Mr. Stompff simply detestable, and spite of Geoff's half-hints, took no pains to disguise her feelings. Not that she was ever demonstrative—it was her calm quiet *insouciance* that roused Mr. Stompff's wrath. "I can't tell what to make of that woman," he would say; "she never gives Ludlow a word of encouragement, but sits there yea-nay, by G—, lookin' as though she didn't know he was grindin' his fingers off to earn money for her! She don't seem to take any notice of what's goin' on; but sits moonin' there, lookin' straight before her, and treatin' me and her husband as if we was dirt! Who's she, I should like to know, to give herself airs and graces like that? It was all very well when Ludlow wanted a model for that Skyllar picture; but there's no occasion for a man to marry his models, that I've heard of—leastways it ain't generally done. She don't seem to know that it's from me all the money comes, by the way she treats me. She don't seem to think that that pretty house

and furniture, and all the nice things which she has, are paid for by my money. She's never a decent word to say to me. Damme, I hate her!"

And Mr. Stompff did not content himself by exploding in this manner. He let off this safety-valve of self-communion to keep himself from boiling over; but all the cause for his wrath still remained, and he referred to it, mentally, not unfrequently. He knew that Geoffrey Ludlow was one of his greatest cards; he knew that he had obtained a certain mastery over him at a very cheap rate; but he also knew that Ludlow was a man impressible to the highest degree, and that if he were preoccupied or annoyed, say by domestic trouble for instance—and there was nothing in a man of Geoffrey's temperament more destructive to work than domestic trouble—he would be incapable of earning his money properly. Why should there be domestic trouble at Elm Lodge? Mr. Stompff had his ears wider open than most men, and had heard a certain something which had been rumoured about at the time of Geoff's marriage; but he had not paid

much attention to it. There were many *ateliers* which he was in the habit of frequenting,—and the occupants of which turned out capital pictures for him,—where he saw ladies playing the hostess's part whose names had probably never appeared in a marriage-register; but that was nothing to him. Most of them accepted Mr. Stompff's compliments, and made themselves agreeable to the great *entrepreneur*, and laughed at his coarse story and his full-flavoured joke, and were only too delighted to get them, in conjunction with his cheque. But this wife of Ludlow's was a woman of a totally different stamp; and her treatment of him so worried Mr. Stompff that he determined to find out more about her. Charley Potts was the most intimate friend of Ludlow's available to Mr. Stompff, and to Charley Potts Mr. Stompff determined to go.

It chanced that on the morning which the great picture-dealer had selected to pay his visit, Mr. Bowker had strolled into Charley Potts's rooms, and found their proprietor hard at work. Mr. Bowker's object, though prompted by very differ-

ent motives from those of Mr. Stompff, was identically the same. Old William had heard some of those irrepressible rumours which, originating no one knows how, gather force and strength from circulation, and had come to talk to Mr. Potts about them. "Dora in the Cornfield" had progressed so admirably since Bowker's last visit, that after filling his pipe he stood motionless before it, with the unlighted lucifer in his hand.

"'Pon my soul, I think you'll do something some day, young 'un!" were his cheering words. "That's the real thing! Wonderful improvement since I saw it; got rid of the hay-headed child, and come out no end. Don't think the sunlight's *quite* that colour, is it? and perhaps no reason why those reaping-parties shouldn't have noses and mouths as well as eyes and chins. Don't try scamping, Charley,—you're not big enough for that; wait till you're made an R.A., and then the critics will point out the beauties of your outline; at present you must copy nature. And now"—lighting his pipe—"how are you?"

"O, I'm all right, William," responded Mr.

Potts; "all right, and working like any number of steam-engines. Orson, sir—if I may so describe myself—Orson is endowed with reason. Orson has begun to find out that life is different from what he imagined, and has gone in for something different."

"Ha!" said old Bowker, eyeing the young man kindly as he puffed at his pipe; "it's not very difficult to discover what's up now, then."

"O, I don't want to make any mystery about it," said Charley. "The simple fact is, that having seen the folly of what is called a life of pleasure—"

"At thirty years of age!" interrupted Bowker.

"Well, what then?—at thirty years of age! One does not want to be a Methuselah like you before one discovers the vanity, the emptiness, the heartlessness of life."

"Of course not, Charley!" said Bowker, greatly delighted. "Go on!"

"And I intend to—to—to cut it, Bowker, and go in for something better. It's something, sir, to have something to work for. I have an end in view, to—"

"Well, but you've always had that. I thought that your ideas were concentrated on being President of the Academy, and returning thanks for your health, proposed by the Prime Minister."

"Bowker, you are a ribald. No, sir; there is a spur to my ambition far beyond the flabby presidentship of that collection of dreary old parties—"

"Yes, I know; and the spur is marked with the initials M. L. That it, Master Charley?"

"It may be, Bowker, and it may be not. Meanwhile, my newly-formed but unalterable resolutions do not forbid the discussion of malt-liquor, and Caroline yet understands the signal-code."

With these words, Mr. Potts proceeded to make his ordinary pantomimic demonstration at the window, and, when the beer arrived, condescended to give up work for a time; and, lighting a pipe and seating himself in his easy-chair, he entered into conversation with his friend.

"And suppose the spur were marked with M. L.," said he, reverting to the former topic,

after a little desultory conversation,—" suppose the spur were marked with M. L., what would be the harm of that, Bowker?"

"Harm!" growled old Bowker; "you don't imagine when you begin to speak seriously of such a thing that I, of all people, should say there was any harm in it? I thought you were chaffing at first, and so I chaffed; but I'm about the last man in the world to dissuade a young fellow with the intention and the power to work from settling himself in life with a girl such as I know this one to be. So far as I have seen of her, she has all our Geoff's sweetness of disposition combined with an amount of common-sense and knowledge of the world which Geoff never had and never will have."

"She's A 1, old boy, and that's all about it; but we're going a-head rather too quickly. I've not said a word to her yet, and I scarcely know whether—"

"Nonsense, Charley! A man who is worth any thing knows right well whether a woman cares for him or not; and knows in what way she

cares for him too. On this point I go back to my old ground again, and say that Geoffrey Ludlow's sister could not be dishonest enough to flirt and flatter and play the deuce with a man. There's too much honesty about the family; and you would be in a very different state of mind, young fellow, if you thought there was any doubt as to how your remarks would be received in that quarter, when you chose to speak."

Mr. Potts smiled, and pulled his moustache, triumphantly now, not doubtfully as was his wont. Then his face settled into seriousness, as he said:

"You're right, William, I think. I hope so, please God! I've never said so much as this to any one, as you may guess; but I love that girl with all my heart and soul, and if only the dealers will stick by me, I intend to tell her that same very shortly. But what you just said has turned my thoughts into another channel—our Geoff."

"Well, what about our Geoff?" asked Mr. Bowker, twisting round on his seat, and looking hard at his friend.

"You must have noticed, Bowker—probably much more than I have, for you're more accustomed to that sort of thing—that our Geoff's not right lately. There's something wrong up there at Elm Lodge, that I can't make out,—that I daren't think of. You remember our talks both before and after Geoff's marriage? Well, I must hark back upon them. He's not happy, William—there, you have the long and the short of it! I'm a bad hand at explaining these matters, but Geoff's not happy. He's made a mistake; and though I don't think he sees it himself—or if he does, he would die sooner than own it—there can be no doubt about it. Mrs. Ludlow does not understand,—does not appreciate him; and our Geoff's no more like our crony of old days than I'm like Raffaelle. There, that's it as clear as I can put it!"

Bowker waited for an instant, and then he said:

"I've tried hard enough, God knows!—hard enough to prevent myself from thinking as you think, Charley; but all to no purpose. There is a cloud over Geoff's life, and I fear it springs

from——Some one knocking. Keep 'em out, if possible; we don't want any one boring in here just now."

But the knocker, whoever he was, seemed by no means inclined to be kept out. He not only obeyed the regular directions and "tugged the trotter," but he afterwards gave three distinct and loud raps with his fist on the door, which was the signal to the initiated; and when the door was opened and the knocker appeared in the person of Mr. Stompff, further resistance was useless.

The great man entered the room with a light and airy step and a light and airy address. "Well, Charley, how are you? Come to give you a look-up, you see. Hallo! who's this?—Mr. Bowker, how do you do, sir?" in a tone which meant, "What the devil do you do here?" —"how are you, sir?—Well, Charley, what are you at? Going to the bad, you villain,—going to the bad!"

"Not quite that, I hope, Mr. Stompff—"

"Working for Caniche, eh? That's the same

thing, just the same thing! I've heard all about it. You've let that miserable Belgian get hold of you, eh? This is it, is it? Gal in a corn-field and mowers? what you call 'em—reapers? That's it! reapers, and a little child. Some story, eh? O, ah! Tennyson; I don't know him—not bad, by Jove! not half bad! it's Caniche's?"

"Yes; that's Caniche's commission."

"Give you fifty more than he's given to make it over to me. You won't, of course not, you silly feller! it's only my joke. But look here, mind you give me the refusal of the next. I can do better for you than Caniche. He's a poor paltry chap. I go in for great things,—that's my way, Mr. Bowker."

"Is it?" growled old William over his pipe; "then you go in also for great pay, Mr. Stompff, I suppose?"

"Ask your friend Ludlow about that. He'll tell you whether I pay handsomely or not, sir.—By the way, how is your friend Ludlow, Potts?"

"He's all right, I believe."

"And his wife, how's she?"

There was something in his tone and in the expression of his eyes which made Mr. Potts say:

"Mrs. Ludlow is going on very well, I believe," in a tone of seriousness very unusual with Charley.

"That all right," said Mr. Stompff. "Going on very well, eh? Every body will be glad to hear that, and Ludlow in partickler. Going on very well—in a regular domestic quiet manner, eh? That's all right. Hasn't been much used to the domestic style before her marriage, I should think, eh?"

"Whatever you may think, I should advise you not to say much, Mr. Stompff," said Bowker. "I don't think Geoff would much like hearing those things said of his wife; I'm sure I should not of mine."

"N-no; but you have not a wife; I—I mean living, Mr. Bowker," said Stompff with a sneer.

William Bowker swallowed down a great lump rising in his throat, and forcibly restrained the involuntary clenching of his fists, as he replied, "No, you're right there, Mr. Stompff; but still I repeat my advice."

"O, I shall say nothing. People will talk, you know, whether I'm silent or not, and people will want to know who Mrs. Ludlow was before she married Ludlow, and why she's so silent and preoccupied, and why she never goes into society, and why she faints away when she looks at photograph-books, and so on. But I didn't come here to talk of Mrs. Ludlow. Now, Potts, *mon brave*, let us discuss business."

When the great man took his departure, after proposing handsome terms to Charley Potts for a three years' engagement, Bowker said: "There's more in what we were saying when that blatant ruffian came in than I thought for, Charley. The news of Geoff's domestic trouble has got wind."

"I'm afraid so. But what did Stompff mean about the fainting and the photograph-book?"

"God knows! probably an invention and a lie. But when people like Stompff begin to talk in that way, it's bad for those they talk about, depend upon it."

CHAPTER XIV.

THREATENING.

Geoffrey Ludlow felt considerable anxiety about his wife after the day of their inauspicious visit to Lord Caterham; and as anxiety was quite a foreign element in Geoff's placid temperament, it did not sit well upon him, and it rendered him idle and desultory. He could not make up his mind as to the true source of his anxiety,—the real spring of his discomfort. Margaret's health was very good; her naturally fine *physique* shook off illness easily and rapidly, and her rare beauty was once more irradiated with the glow of health and strength. Yet Geoffrey's inquietude was not lessened. He loved this strange woman—this woman who compelled admiration, indeed, from others, but won love only from him with passionate and intense devotion. But he was ill at ease

with her, and he began to acknowledge to himself that it was so. He knew, he felt, that there was some new element, some impalpable power in their lives, which was putting asunder those who had never been very closely united in real bonds of sympathy and confidence, with an irresistible, remorseless hand,—invisible and sure as that of Death.

There are no words to tell what this good fellow suffered in his kindly, unselfish, simple way, as day by day the conviction forced itself upon him that the woman he had so loved, the woman for whom he lived, and worked, and thought, and hoped, was more and more divided from him by some barrier—all the more impassable because he could not point to it and demand an explanation of its presence, or utter a plea for its removal. He would sit in his painting-room quite idle, and with a moody brow—unlike the Geoff Ludlow of old times—and think and puzzle himself about his wife; he would sometimes work, in short desultory fits of industry, desperately, as though putting thought from him by main force;

and then he would meet Margaret, at meals or other times of association, with so indifferent an assumption of being just as usual, that it was wonderful she did not notice the change in her husband. But Geoffrey did not interest her, and Margaret did not observe him with any curiosity. The state of mind of this ill-assorted pair at this time was very curious, had there been any one to understand and analyse it.

"What can it be?" Geoffrey would ask himself. "I cannot make it out. She does not take any interest in any thing. I thought all women loved their children at least, and the coldest warmed to their infants; but she does not."

Geoffrey had ceased to wonder at Margaret's coldness to him. She had always been cold, and latterly her reserve and silence had increased. She made no effort to hide the *ennui* which wholly possessed her; she made no attempt to simulate the interest in his occupations which she had never felt in more than a lukewarm degree. His perceptions were not very quick; but when he did see a thing, he was apt to understand and

reason upon it, and he reasoned upon this now; he pondered upon it and upon his marriage, and he wondered when he remembered the joy and hope with which he had entered upon the pretty, comfortable new home and the quiet industrious life. What had come to it all? What had changed it, and yet left it the same? He had not failed in any duty to this woman; he had not given her less, but more than he had promised; for he was much better off than he had hoped to be, and she had the command of every shilling he earned. Never had an unkind word, a negligent act, a failure in the tenderest of household kindnesses, recorded itself in her memory against this man, who was her preserver, her protector, her husband. Surprise, trouble, vague apprehension, above all, the bewilderment of inexplicable wrong, were in Geoffrey's mind; but not a touch of bitterness against her. He remembered the story she had told him, and the promise he had pledged to her, and his generous heart rested in the assurance she had then given him, and sought no farther. His was not the nature which would

count up the items in the bargain between them, and set down the large balance that really existed on his side. What had he given her? To answer this question aright, knowledge must have been had of her whole life, and all its depths of suffering, of actual physical want sounded; all her love of luxury, all her incapacity to bear privation, all her indolence, her artistic sensuousness, her cultivated power of enjoyment, must have been known and weighed.

He had given her ease, security, respectability,—a name, a home which was comfortable to the verge of luxury, which included all that any woman could reasonably desire who had voluntarily accepted a life upon the scale which it implied—a home to which his industry and his love constantly added new comforts and decorations. Geoffrey never thought of these things,—he did not appraise them; nor did his generous heart dwell upon the sacrifice he had made, the risk he had incurred, in short, upon the extraordinary imprudence of his marriage. His nature was too magnanimous, and not sufficiently prac-

tical for such considerations; he thought of nothing but the love he had given her,—the love she did not seem to understand, to care for,—and he wondered, in his simple way, why such love, so deep and quiet, so satisfied with home and her, could not make her more happy and cheerful. Poor Geoffrey, calm and peace were the conditions of life in which alone he could find or imagine happiness, and they were just those which were detestable to Margaret. It is possible that, had she been caught from the depths of her degradation and despair in the grasp of a nature stronger and more violent than her own, the old thrall might have fallen from her, and she might have been swayed by the mingled charm and authority, the fierceness, the delight, the fear of a great passion, so preoccupying that she would have had no time for retrospect, so entrancing that she would have been forced to live in the present. But the hand that had raised her from the abyss was only gentle and tender; it lacked the force which would have wrung submission from her afterwards, the power to imply that it

could wound as well as caress,—and its touch had no potency for that perverted nature. What had she given him? Just her beauty,—nothing more. She was his wife, and she cared for him no more than she cared for the furniture of her rooms and the trinkets in her jewel-case (poor things, she thought, which once would have been unworthy of her wearing, but chosen with all Geoff's humble science, and bought with the guerdon of many a day of Geoff's hard work); he was her child's father; and the child bored her a little more unendurably than all the rest. Indeed, all the rest was quiet—which at least was something—but the child was not quiet; and Geoffrey made a fuss about it—a circumstance which lent a touch of impatience to her distaste. He talked about the infant,—he wanted to know if she thought her boy's eyes were like her own? and whether she would like him to be an artist like his father? He talked about the boy's eyes, and Lionel's electric glances were haunting her troubled soul; he babbled about the boy's future, when she was enduring the tortures of Tantalus in her terrible longing for the past.

The child throve, and Geoffrey loved the little creature with a vigilant affection curious and beautiful to see. When he felt that the hopes he had built upon the infant, as a new and strong tie between himself and Margaret, as a fresh source of interest, something to awaken her from her torpidity, were not destined to be realised, he turned, in the intensity of his disappointment and discomfiture, to the child itself, and sought—unconsciously it may be, at least unavowedly to himself—to fill up the void in his heart, to restore the warmth to his home, through the innocent medium of the baby. The child did not resemble his mother, even after the difficult-to-be-discovered fashion of likenesses in babyhood. When he opened his eyes, in the solemn and deliberate way in which young children look out upon the mysterious world, they did not disclose violet tints nor oval-shaped heavy lids; they were big brown eyes, like Geoffrey's, and the soft rings of downy hair, which the nurse declared to be "the beautifullest curls she ever see on an 'ead at 'is age," were not golden but dark brown.

Geoffrey held numerous conferences with the nurse about her charge, and might be found many times in the day making his way with elaborate caution, and the noiseless step which is a characteristic of big men, up the nursery-stair; and seen by the curious, had there been any to come there, gazing at the infant lying in his cradle, or on his nurse's knee, with a wistful rueful expression, and his hands buried in the pockets of his painting-coat.

He never found Margaret in the nursery on any of these occasions, and she never evinced the slightest interest in the nursery government, or responded to any of his ebullitions of feeling on the subject. Of course the servants were not slow to notice the indifference of the mother, and to comment upon it with unreserved severity. Margaret was not a favourite at any time—"master" being perfection in their minds—and her cold reserve and apathy impressing the domestics, who could not conceive that "a good home" could be despicable in even the most beautiful eyes, very unfavourably.

Margaret was arraigned before the domestic tribunal, unknown to herself; though, had she known it, the circumstance would have made no impression upon her. Her cold pride would at all times have rendered her indifferent to opinion; and now that indifference, weariness, and distaste had entire possession of her, she had not even cared to hide the dreary truth from her husband's mother and sister. What had become of her resolutions with regard to them? Where were her first impulses of gratitude? Gone—sunk in the Dead Sea of her overmastering passion—utterly lost beneath the tide of her conscienceless selfishness. She could not strive, she could not pretend, she could not play any part longer. Why should she, to whom such talk was twaddle of the trashiest description, try to appear interested because she had given birth to Geoffrey's child? Well, there was the child; let them make much of it, and talk nonsense to it and about it. What was Geoffrey's child to her, or Geoffrey's mother, or—she had gone very near to saying Geoffrey himself either, but something

dimly resembling a pang of conscience stopped her. He was very good, very honest, very kind; and she was almost sorry for him,—as nearly sorry as she could be for any but herself; and then the tide of that sorrow for herself dashed over and swept all these trifling scraps of vague regret, of perhaps elementary remorse, away on its tumultuous waves.

She was cursed with such keen memory, she was haunted with such a terrible sense of contrast! Had it been more dreadful, more agonising, when she was a wanderer in the pitiless streets,—starving, homeless, dying of sheer want; when the bodily suffering she endured was so great that it benumbed her mind, and deadened it to all but craving for food and shelter? The time of this terrible experience lay so far in the past now, that she had begun to forget the reality of the torture; she had begun to undervalue its intensity, and to think that she had purchased rescue too dear. Too dear!—she, whose glance could not fall around her without resting on some memorial of the love she had won; she, whose daily life was

sheltered from every breath of ill and care! She had always been weary; now she was growing enraged. Like the imprisoned creatures of the desert and the jungle, in whom long spells of graceful apathetic repose are succeeded by fierce fits of rebellious struggle, she strove and fought with the gentle merciful fate which had brought her into this pretty prison and supplied her with dainty daily fare. It had all been bearable—at least until now—and she had borne it well, and never turned upon her keeper. But the wind had set from the lands of sun and fragrance, from the desert whose sands were golden, whose wells were the sparkling waters of life and love, and she had scented the old perfume in the breeze. All the former instincts revived, the slight chain of formal uncongenial habit fell away, and in the strength of passion and beauty she rebelled against her fate. Perhaps the man she loved and longed for, as the sick long for health or the shipwrecked for a sail, had never seen her look so beautiful as she looked one day, when, after Mrs. Ludlow and her daughter, who

had come to lunch at Elm Lodge, had gone away, and Geoffrey, puzzled and mortified more than ever, had returned to his painting-room, she stood by the long window of the drawing-room, gazing out over the trim little space which bloomed with flowers and glowed in the sunshine, with eyes which seemed indeed as if their vision cleft distance and disdained space. Her cheeks, usually colourless, were touched with a faint rose-tinge; and the hurry and excitement of her thoughts seemed to pervade her whole frame, which was lighted by the rays of the afternoon sun, from the rich coils of her red-gold hair to the restless foot which tapped the carpet angrily. As she stood, varying expressions flitted over her face like clouds; but in them all there was an intensity new to it, and which would have told an observer that the woman who looked so was taking a resolution.

Suddenly she lifted her hands above her head to the full extent of her arms, then tore the twisted fingers asunder with a moan, as if of pain or hunger, and letting them fall by her side, flung herself into a chair.

"Have you heard any thing of Lord Caterham lately?" asked Mrs. Geoffrey Ludlow of her husband, a few days after his mother's visit, just as Geoffrey, having breakfasted, was about to retire to his painting-room. She asked the question in the most careless possible manner, and without removing her eyes from the *Times*, which she was reading; but Geoffrey was pleased that she should have asked it at all,—any sign of interest on Margaret's part in any one for whom he cared being still precious to Geoffrey, and becoming rarer and more rare.

"No, dear," he replied; "Annie said she would write as soon as Lord Caterham should be well enough to see me. I suppose I may tell her, then, that she may come and see you. You are quite well now, Margaret?"

"O yes, quite well," she replied; and then added, with the faintest flicker of colour on her cheek, "Lord Caterham's brother is not at home, I believe. Have you ever seen him?"

"Captain Brakespere? No, not I. There's something wrong about him. I don't understand

the story, but Annie just mentioned that Lord Caterham had been in great distress about him. Well, Margaret, I'm off now to the Esplanade."

He looked wistfully at her; but she did not speak or lift up her eyes, and he went out of the room.

If there was trouble of the silent and secret kind in Geoffrey's home, there was also discontent of the outspoken sort at his mother's cheerful house in Brompton.

Mrs. Ludlow was wholly unprepared to find that Margaret cared so little for her child. It was with no small indignation that she commented upon Margaret's demeanour, as she and her daughter sat together; and deeper than her indignation lay her anxiety, and a vague apprehension of evil in store for her darling son.

"She is sulky and discontented,—that's what she is," repeated Mrs. Ludlow; "and what she can want or wish for that she has not got passes my comprehension."

Miss Ludlow said that perhaps it was only accidental. She would be sorry to think Mar-

garet had such faults of temper to any confirmed degree. It would be dreadful for dear old Geoff, who was so sweet-tempered himself, and who never could understand unamiable persons. But she added she did not think Geoff perceived it. She was sure he would never think that Margaret was not fond of the child.

"O yes, he does perceive it," said Mrs. Ludlow; "I can see that very plainly; I saw it in his face when he came up to the nursery with us, and she never offered to stir; and did you not notice, Til, that when I asked her what the doctor said about vaccinating baby, she looked at me quite vacantly, and Geoffrey answered? Ah, no; he knows it well enough, poor fellow; and how ever he is to get through life with a woman with a bad temper and no heart, I'm sure I can't tell."

Geoffrey had never relaxed in his attention to his mother. In the early days of his marriage, when he had persuaded himself that there was nothing in the least disappointing in Margaret's manner, and that he was perfectly happy; in

those days to which he looked back now, in the chill dread and discomfort of the present, as to vanished hours of Paradise, he had visited his mother, sent her presents, written short cheery notes to her and Til, and done every thing in his power to lessen their sense of the inevitable separation which his marriage had brought about. His love and his happiness had had no hardening or narrowing effect upon Geoffrey Ludlow. They had quickened his perceptions and added delicacy to his sympathies. But there was a difference now. Geoffrey felt unwilling to see his mother and sister; he felt that their perception of Margaret's conduct had been distinct, and their disapproval complete; and he shrank from an interview which must include avoidance of the subject occupying all their minds. He would not willingly have had Margaret blamed, even by implication, by others; though there was something more like anger than he had ever felt or thought he could feel towards her in his gentle heart, as he yielded to the conviction that she had no love for her child.

Thus it happened that Geoffrey did not see his mother and sister for a week just at this time, during which interval there was no change in the state of affairs at home. He wrote, indeed, to Til, and made cheery mention of the boy and of his picture, which was getting on splendidly, and at which he was working so hard that he could not manage to get so far as Brompton for a day or two yet, but would go very soon; and Margaret sent her love. So Geoffrey made out a letter which might have been written by a blundering schoolboy—a letter over which his mother bent sad and boding looks, and Til had a "good cry." Though Geoffrey had not visited them lately, the ladies had not been altogether deprived of the society of men and artists. The constancy with which Charley Potts paid his respects was quite remarkable; and it fell out that, seeing Matilda rather out of spirits, and discerning that something was going wrong, Charley very soon extracted from Til what that something was, and they proceeded to exchange confidences on the subject of Geoffrey and his beautiful wife.

Charley informed Matilda that none of "our fellows" who had been introduced to Mrs. Geoffrey liked her; and as for Stompff, "he hates her all out, you know," said the plain-spoken Charley; "but I don't mind that, for she's a lady, and Stompff—he—he's a beast, you know."

When Geoffrey could no longer defer a visit to his mother without the risk of bringing about questions and expostulations which must make the state of things at home openly known, and place him in the embarrassing position of being obliged to avow an estrangement for which he could assign no cause, he went to Brompton. The visit was not a pleasant one, though the mother and sister were even more demonstrative in their affectionate greeting than usual, and though they studiously avoided any reference to the subject in their minds and in his. But this was just what he dreaded; they *did* studiously avoid it; and by doing so they confirmed all his suspicions, they realised all his fears. Geoffrey did not even then say to himself that his marriage was a mistake, and his mother and sister had discovered it; but

had his thoughts, his misgivings been put into words, they must have taken some such shape. They talked energetically about the child, and asked Geoff all sorts of feminine questions, which it would have affected a male listener rather oddly to have heard Geoff answer with perfect seriousness, and a thorough acquaintance with details. He had several little bits of news for them; how Mr. Stompff, reminiscent of his rather obtrusive promise, had sent the clumsiest, stumpiest, ugliest lump of a silver mug procurable in London as a present to the child, but had not presented himself at Elm Lodge; how Miss Maurice had been so delighted with the little fellow, and had given him a beautiful embroidered frock, and on Lord Caterham's behalf endowed him with a salver "big enough to serve himself up upon, mother," said Geoff, with his jolly laugh: "I put him on it, and carried him round the room for Annie to see."

Beyond the inevitable inquiries, there was no mention made of Margaret; but when his mother kissed him at parting, and when Til lin-

gered a moment longer than usual, with her arms round his neck, at the door, Geoffrey felt the depth and bitterness of the trouble that had come into his life more keenly, more chillingly than he had felt it yet.

"This shall not last," he said, as he walked slowly towards home, his head bent downwards, and all his features clouded with the gloom that had settled upon him. "This shall not last any longer. I have done all I can; if she is unhappy, it is not my fault; but I must know why. I cannot bear it; I have not deserved it. I will keep silence no longer. She must explain what it means."

CHAPTER XV.

LADY BEAUPORT'S PLOT COLLAPSES.

Although the flame of life, at its best a feeble flicker,—now brightened by a little gust of hope, now deadened by an access of despair,—had begun steadily to lessen in Lord Caterham's breast, and he felt, with that consciousness which never betrays, that his interest in this world, small as it had been, was daily growing less, he had determined to prevent the execution of one act which he knew would be terribly antagonistic to the welfare of her whom his heart held dearest. We, fighting the daily battle of life, going forth each morning to the encounter, returning each eve with fresh dints on our harness, new notches in our swords, and able to reckon up the cost and the advantages gained by the day's combat, are

unable to appreciate the anxieties and heart-burnings, the longings and the patience of those whom we leave behind us as a *corps de réserve*, apparently inactive, but in reality partaking of all the worst of the contest without the excitement of sharing it. The conflict that was raging amongst the Beauport family was patent to Caterham; he saw the positions taken up by the contending parties, had his own shrewd opinion as to their being tenable or the reverse, calmly criticised the various points of strategy, and laid his plans accordingly. In this it was an advantage to him that he was out of the din and the shouting and the turmoil of the battle; nobody thought of him, any more than any one in the middle of an action thinks of the minister in his office at home, by whom the despatches are written, and who in reality pulls the strings by which the man in scarlet uniform and gold-laced cocked-hat is guided, and to whom he is responsible. Lord Caterham was physically unfitted for the conduct of strategic operations, but he was mentally qualified for the exercise of diplo-

macy in the highest degree; and diplomacy was required in the present juncture.

In his solitary hours he had been accustomed to recal his past life in its apparently insignificant, but to him important ramifications;—the red south wall is the world to the snail that has never known other resting-place;—and in these days of illness and languor he reverted more and more to his old means of passing the time. A dull retrospect—a weary going over and over again of solitude, depression, and pain. Thoughts long since forgotten recurred to him as in the silence of the night he passed in review the petty incidents of his uneventful career. He recollected the burning shame which had first possessed him at the knowledge of his own deformity; the half envy, half wonder, with which he had gazed at other lads of his own age; the hope that had dawned upon him that his parents and friends might feel for him something of the special love with which Tiny Tim was regarded in that heartfullest of all stories, *The Christmas Carol;* how that wondrous book had charmed him, when, a

boy of ten or twelve years old, he had first read it; how, long before it had been seen by either his father or mother, he had studied and wept over it; how, prompted by a feeling which he could not analyse, he had induced Lord Beauport to read it; how he knew—intuitively, he was never told—that it had been shown to his mother; and how that Christmas-tide he had been treated with consideration and affection never before accorded to him—had been indeed preferred to Lionel, greatly to that young gentleman's astonishment and disgust. It did not last long, that halcyon time; the spells of the romancer held the practical father and the fashionable mother in no lengthened thrall; and when they were dissipated, there was merely a crippled, deformed, blighted lad as their eldest hope and the heir to their honours. Tiny Tim borne aloft on his capering father's shoulders; Tiny Tim in his grave,—these were images to wring the heart not unpleasantly, and to fill the eyes with tears of which one was rather proud, as proof of how easily the heart was wrung: but for a handsome couple—one known

as a *beau garçon*, the other as a beauty—to have to face the stern fact that their eldest son was a cripple was any thing but agreeable.

Untrusted—that was it. Never from his earliest days could he recollect what it was to have trust reposed in him. He knew—he could not help knowing—how superior he was in ability and common-sense to any in that household; he knew that his father at least was perfectly aware of this; and yet that Lord Beauport could not disconnect the idea of bodily decrepitude and mental weakness; and therefore looked upon his eldest son as little more than a child in mind. As for Caterham's mother, the want of any feeling in common between them, the utter absence of any maternal tenderness, the manifest distaste with which she regarded him, and the half-wearied, half-contemptuous manner in which she put aside the attempts he made towards a better understanding between them, had long since begun to tell upon him. There was a time when, smarting under her lifelong neglect, and overcome by the utter sense of desolation weighing

him down, he had regarded his mother with a feeling bordering on aversion; then her presence, occasionally bestowed upon him—always for her own purposes—awakened in him something very like disgust. But he had long since conquered that: he had long since argued himself out of that frame of mind. Self-commune had done its work; the long, long days and nights of patient reflection and self-examination, aided by an inexplicable sense of an overhanging great change, had softened and subdued all that had been temporarily hard and harsh in Lord Caterham's nature; and there was no child, kneeling at its little bedside, whose "God bless dear papa and mamma!" was more tenderly earnest than the blessing which the crippled man constantly invoked on his parents.

He loved them in a grave, steady, reverential, dutiful way—loved them even with greater warmth, with more complete fondness than he had done for years; but his love never touched his instinct of justice—never warped his sense of what was right. He remembered how, years

before, he had been present, a mere boy, sitting perched up in his wheelchair, apparently forgotten in an obscure corner of his father's study at Homershams, while Lord Beauport administered a terrific "wigging," ending in threats of gaols and magistrates, to an unlucky wretch accused of poaching by the head-keeper; and he recollected how, when the man had been dismissed with a severe warning, he had talked to and argued with his father, first on the offence, and then on Lord Beauport's administration of justice, with an air of grave and earnest wisdom which had amused his father exceedingly. He had held the same sentiments throughout his dreary life—he held them now. He knew that a plot was formed by his mother to bring his brother Lionel back to England, with a view to his marriage with Annie Maurice, and he was determined that that plot should not succeed. Why? He had his reasons, as they had theirs. To his own heart he confessed that he loved Annie with all the depth of his soul; but that was not what prompted him in this matter. He should be far removed

from the troubling before that; but he had his reason, and he should keep it to himself. They had not trusted in him, though they had been compelled to take allies from the outside—dear old Algy Barford, for instance—but they had not trusted him, and he would not reveal his secret. Was Lionel to marry Annie Maurice, eh? No; that should never be. He might not be there himself to prevent it; but he would leave behind him instructions with some one, which would—Ah! he had hit upon the some one at once,—Geoffrey Ludlow, Annie's oldest and dearest friend, honest as the day, brave and disinterested; not a clever business man perhaps, but one who, armed with what he could arm him with, must, with his sheer singleness of purpose, carry all before him. So far, so good; but there would be a first step which they would take perhaps before he could bring that weapon into play. His mother would contrive to get Lionel into the house, on his return, to live with them, so that he might have constant opportunities of access to Annie. That was a point in which, as he gleaned,

she placed the greatest confidence. If her Lionel had not lost all the fascinating qualities which had previously so distinguished him; if he preserved his looks and his address, this young girl—so inexperienced in the world's ways, so warm-hearted and impressible—would have no choice but to succumb.

Caterham would see about that at once. Lionel should never remain *en permanence* in that house again. Lady Beauport would object of course. She had, when she had set her mind upon an object, a steady perseverance in its accomplishment; but neither her patience nor her diplomacy were comparable to his, when he was equally resolved, as she should find. No; on that point at least he was determined. His darling, his treasure, should not even be compelled to run the gauntlet of such a sin-stained courtship as his brother Lionel's must necessarily be. What might be awaiting her in the future, God alone knew: temptations innumerable; pursuit by fortune-hunters; all those trials which beset a girl who, besides being pretty and rich, has no blood-

relative on whom to reckon for counsel and aid. He would do his best to remedy this deficiency; he would leave the fullest instructions, the warmest adjurations to good Geoffrey Ludlow—ah! what a pity it was that Ludlow's wife was not more heartful and reliable!—and he would certainly place a veto upon the notion that Lionel, on his return, should become an inmate of the house. He knew that this must be done quickly, and he determined to take the first opportunity that presented itself. That opportunity was not long in coming; within ten days after Margaret's fainting-fit, Lady Beauport paid one of her rare maternal visits, and Lord Caterham saw that his chance had arrived.

There was an extra glow of geniality in Lady Beauport's manner that morning, and the frosty peck which she had made at her son's cheek had perhaps a trifle more warmth in it than usual. She seated herself instead of standing, as was her wont, and chatted pleasantly.

"What is this I hear about your having a lady fainting in your room, Arthur?" said she, with one of her shiniest smiles. (What calumny

they spread about enamel! Lady Beauport smiled perpetually, and her complexion never cracked in the slightest degree.) "You must not bring down scandal on our extremely proper house. She did faint, didn't she?"

"O, yes, mother, she did faint undoubtedly —went what you call regularly 'off,' I believe."

"Ah! so Stephens told Timpson. Well, sir, don't you think that is reprehensible enough? A lady comes to call on a bachelor, and is discovered fainting! Why? Heaven only knows—" and her ladyship gave an unpleasantly knowing chuckle.

"Well, I must admit that no one knows, or ever will know why, save that the lady was probably over-fatigued, having only just recovered from a serious illness. But then, you know, the lady's husband was with her, so that—"

"O, yes, I heard all about that. You are a most prudent swain, Caterham! The lady's husband with her, indeed! Most prudent! You always remind me of the play—I don't know what it's called—something about a French milliner and a screen—"

"'The School for Scandal,' you mean?"

"Very likely. I've forgotten the name, but I know I recollect seeing Farren and Miss Foote and all of them in it. And I so often think of the two brothers: you so quiet and reserved, like one; and the other so rackety and buoyant, so full of high spirits and gaiety, like our Lionel. Ah me!" and Lady Beauport heaved a deep sigh and clasped her hands sadly in front of her.

Caterham smiled—rather a sad dreary smile—as he said, "Let us trust that quiet and reserve don't always have the effect which they produced on the gentleman to whom you are alluding, mother. But I may as well let you know the real story of Mrs. Ludlow's fainting-fit, which seems to have become rather warped in its journey. I had asked her husband to call upon me on a matter of business; and he foolishly brought her—only just out of her confinement—with him. The consequence was, that, as we were talking, and she was looking through a book of photographs, she fainted away."

"Ay! I heard something of that sort. She

must be a curious person to be so easily affected, or it was thoughtless of her husband to bring her out too soon. He is an odd kind of man though, is he not? Absent, and that kind of thing?"

"Ye-es; his heart is in his work, and he is generally thinking about it."

"So I had imagined. What odd people you know, Arthur! Your acquaintances all seem such strange people—so different from your father's and mine!"

"Yes, mother," said Caterham, with a repetition of the sad smile; "perhaps you're right generally. Your friends would scarcely care for me, and I am sure I do not care for them. But Geoffrey Ludlow became known to me through his old intimacy with Annie—our Annie."

"Ye-es. I scarcely know why 'our Annie,' though. You see, both your father and I have many blood-relations, more or less distant, on either side; and it would not be particularly convenient if the mere fact of their being blood-relations compelled us to acknowledge them as 'ours.' Not that I've any thing to say against

Miss Maurice, though; on the contrary, she's a very charming girl. At one time I thought that —However, let that pass. She holds quite a different position now; and I think every one will allow that my treatment of her is what it should be."

"Of course, mother. No one would dream of doubting it."

"Well, perhaps not, Arthur; but you're such a recluse, you know, that you're scarcely a judge of these things—one does not know what people won't say. The world is so full of envy and jealousy, and all that, I'm sure my position in regard to the matter is any thing but an agreeable one. Here I am, having to act *chaperon* to this girl, who is known now as an heiress; and all kinds of men paying her attention, simply on account of her wealth. What I suffer when we're out together, you can't conceive. Every night, wherever we may be, there is a certain set of men always hanging about her, waiting for an introduction—persons whose acquaintance cannot do her the slightest good, and with whom she is yet

quite as willing to talk or to dance as she is with the most available *parti* in London."

Caterham smiled again. "You forget, mother, that she's not accustomed to the kind of life—"

"No; I don't forget any thing of the kind, Arthur. It is her not being accustomed to it that is my greatest trouble. She is as raw as a child of seventeen after her first drawing-room. If she had any *savoir faire*, any knowledge of society, I should be perfectly at ease. A girl of any appreciation would know how to treat these people in an instant. Why, I know myself, that when I was far younger than Miss Maurice, I should have felt a kind of instinctive warning against two-thirds of the men with whom Annie Maurice is as talkative and as pleasant as though they were really persons whose acquaintance it was most desirable that she should make."

"And yet Annie is decidedly a clever girl."

"So much the worse, Arthur,—so much the worse. The more reason that she is utterly unlikely to possess or to be able readily to acquire

the peculiar knowledge which would fit her to act under the circumstances of which I am speaking. Your clever people—such at least as are called clever by you and those whom you cultivate—are precisely the people who act idiotically in worldly affairs, who either know nothing or who set at defiance the *convenances* of society, and of whom nothing can be made. That man—no, let me give you an example—that man who dined here last Thursday on your invitation—Professor Somebody, wasn't he?—I've heard of him at that place where they give the scientific lectures in Albemarle Street—was any thing ever seen like his cravat, or his shoes, or the way in which he ate his soup?—he trod on my dress twice in going down to dinner, and I heard perfectly plainly what Lady Clanronald said to that odious Mr. Beauchamp Hogg about him."

"My father spoke to me in the highest terms about—"

"Of course he did; that's just it. Your father knows nothing about this sort of thing. It all falls upon me. If Annie Maurice were to

make a *mésalliance*, or, without going so far as that, were to permit herself to be engaged to some penniless fortune-hunter, and were to refuse—as she very likely would, for she has an amount of obstinacy in her composition, I am inclined to think, which one very seldom finds—to listen to the remonstrances of those whose opinion ought to have weight with her, it is I, not your father, who would be blamed by the world."

"Your troubles certainly seem greater, mother, than I, in my bachelor ignorance, could have imagined."

"They are not comprehensible even after my explanation, Arthur, by those who have not to undergo them. There is scarcely any thing in my married life which has given me such pleasure as the thought that, having no daughters, I should be relieved of all duties of chaperonage; that I should not be compelled to go to certain places unless I wished; and that I should be able to leave others at what hours I liked. And now I find this very duty incumbent upon me."

"Well, but, my dear mother, surely Annie is

the very last girl in the world for whom it is necessary to make any such sacrifices. She does not care about going out; and when out, she seems, from all she says to me, to have only one anxiety, and that is—to get home again as soon as possible."

"Ay, from all she says to you, Arthur; but then you know, as I've said before, you are a regular old bachelor, without the power of comprehending these things, and to whom a girl certainly would not be likely to show her real feelings. No; there's only one way to relieve me from my responsibility."

"And that is—"

"And that is by getting her married."

"A-ah!" Caterham drew a long breath—it was coming now.

"Married," continued Lady Beauport, "to some one whom we know, and in whom we could trust; some one who would keep her near us, so that we could still keep up an interest in her; and you—for I know how very much attached you are to her, Arthur—could see her constantly, without

trouble to yourself. That is the only manner in which I can see a conclusion to my anxiety on Annie's account."

Lady Beauport endeavoured to speak in the same tone in which she had commenced the conversation; but there was a quiver in her voice and a tremulous motion in her hands which showed Caterham plainly that she was ill at ease.

"And do you think that such a husband would be easily found for Annie, mother?" said he, looking up at her with one of his steady piercing glances from under his eyebrows.

"Not easily, of course; but still to be found, Arthur."

"From your manner, you seem to have already given the subject some attention. May I ask if you have any one in prospect who would fulfil all the conditions you have laid down in the first place, and in the second would be likely to be acceptable to Annie?"

"How very singular you are, Arthur! You speak in a solemn tone, as if this were the most important matter in the world."

"It is sufficiently important to Annie at least. Would you mind answering me?"

Lady Beauport saw that it was useless fighting off the explanation any further. Her project must be disclosed now, however it might be received by her eldest son; and she determined to bring her stateliest and most dignified manner to its disclosure: so she composed her face to its usual cold statuesque calmness, folded her wandering hands before her, and in a voice in which there was neither break nor tremor, said:

"No: I will answer you quite straightforwardly. I think that it would be an admirable thing for all parties if a marriage could be arranged between Annie Maurice and your brother Lionel. Lionel has position, and is a distinguished-looking man, of whom any woman might be proud; and the fortune which Mr. Ampthill so oddly left to Miss Maurice will enable him to hold his own before the world, and—how strangely you look, Caterham!—what is the matter?—what were you about to say?"

"Only one thing, mother — that marriage must never be."

"Must never be!"

"Never. Hear me out. I have kept accurate account of all you have said, and will judge you in the first place simply out of your own mouth. Your first point was that Miss Maurice should be married to some one whom we knew, and whom we could trust. Could we trust Lionel? Could we trust the man whose father's head was bowed to the dust, whose mother's eyes were filled with tears at the mere recital of his deeds of sin and shame? Could we trust the man who was false to his friend, and who dragged down into the dirt not merely himself, but all who bore his name? You spoke of his position—what is that, may I ask? Are we to plume ourselves on our relationship with an outcast? or are we to hold out as an inducement to the heiress the fact that her intended husband's liberty is at the mercy of those whom he has swindled and defrauded?"

"Caterham! Arthur! you are mad—you—"

"No, mother, I am simply speaking the truth. I should not even have insisted on that in all its bitterness, had I not been goaded to it by your words. You talk of devoting the fortune which Annie Maurice has inherited to setting Lionel right before the world, and you expect me to sit quietly by! Why, the merest instincts of justice would have made me cry out against such a monstrous proposition, even if Lionel had not long since forfeited, as Annie has long since won, all my love."

"A-h!" said Lady Beauport, suddenly pausing in her tears, and looking up at him,—"long since won all your love, eh? I have often suspected that, Caterham; and now you have betrayed yourself. It is jealousy then,—mere personal jealousy,—by which all your hatred of your younger brother is actuated!"

Once more the dreary smile came over Lord Caterham's face. "No, mother," said he, "it is not that. I love Annie Maurice as I love the sun, as I love health, as I love rest from pain and weariness; and with about as much hope of

winning either. You could confer on me no greater happiness than by showing me the man deserving of her love; and the thought that her future would have a chance of being a happy one would relieve my life of its heaviest anxiety. But marry Lionel she shall not; nay, more, she shall not be exposed to the chance of communication with him, so long as I can prevent it."

"You forget yourself, Lord Caterham! You forget not merely whose house you are in, but to whom you are speaking."

"I trust not, mother. I trust I shall never —certainly not now, at this time—forget my duty to you and to my father; but I know more than I can ever divulge even to you. Take for granted what I tell you; let what you know of Lionel's ways and conduct suffice to prove that a marriage between him and Annie is impossible,—that you would be culpable in lending yourselves to such a scheme."

"I have not the least idea of what you are talking about, Arthur," said Lady Beauport after a minute's pause. "You appear to have con-

ceived some ridiculous idea about your brother Lionel, into the discussion of which you must really excuse my following you. Besides, even if you had good grounds for all you say, you are too late in making the remonstrance. Lionel arrived in England the day before yesterday."

Lord Caterham started, and by the help of his stick raised himself for a moment.

"Lionel returned! Lionel in England, mother! After all his promises, after the strict conditions on which my father purchased for him immunity from the penalties of his crime! How is this? Does Lord Beauport know it?"

Lady Beauport hesitated. She had been betrayed by her vexation into saying more than she had intended, and had placed Lionel in his brother's power. Lord Caterham, she had hoped, would have received her confidence in a different spirit,—perhaps she had calculated on his being flattered by its novelty,—and would assist her in breaking the fact of the prodigal's return to his father, and winning him over to her way of thinking. She had by no means forgotten the pain-

ful solemnity with which the Earl had renounced Lionel, and the formal sentence of exclusion which had been passed against him; but Lady Beauport understood her husband well, and had managed him with tolerable success for many years. He had forbidden all mention of their son to her, as to every other member of the family; but Lady Beauport had been in the habit of insinuating an occasional mention of him for some time past; and it had not been badly received. Perhaps neither the father nor the mother would have acknowledged to themselves or to each other the share in this change of feeling which belonged to the unmistakable daily decline of Lord Caterham's health. They never alluded to the future, but they saw it, and it influenced them both. Lady Beauport had not looked for Lionel's return so soon; she had expected more patience—it might have been appropriately called more decency—from him; she had thought her difficulties would be much lessened before his return; but he had neglected her injunctions, and forestalled her instructions: he

had arrived,—there was no help for it; she must meet the difficulty now. She had been meeting difficulties, originating from the same source, for many years; and though Caterham's manner annoyed her deeply, she kept her courage up. Her first instinct was to evade her son's last question, by assuming an injured tone in reference to his first. So she said,

"O, it's all very well to talk about his promises, Arthur; but, really, how you could expect Lionel to remain in Australia I cannot understand."

"I did not, and I do not, form any expectations whatever concerning Lionel, mother," her son replied, in a steady voice, and without releasing her from his gaze; "that is beside the question. Lionel has broken his pledged word to my father by returning here,—you know he has, —and he has not given any career a fair trial. I can guess the expectations with which he has returned," he continued in a bitter tone; "and God knows I trust they are not unfounded. But my place is not vacant *yet;* and he has forfeited his

own. You cannot restore it to him. Why has he returned?"

Lady Beauport did not dare to say, "Because I wrote to him, and told him to come home, and marry Annie Maurice, and buy the world's fickle favour over again with her money, while waiting for yours;" but her silence said it for her; and Caterham let his eyes drop from her face in disgust, as he coldly said,

"Once more, madam, I ask you, is my father aware that Lionel is in London?"

"No," she replied boldly, seeing things were at the worst; "he is not. I tell you, Caterham, if you tell him, before I have time and opportunity to break it to him, and set your father against him, and on keeping his word just as a point of pride, I will never forgive you. What good could it do you? What harm has Lionel done you? How could he stay in that horrid place? He's not a tradesman, I should think; and what could he *do* there? nor an Irishman, I hope; so what could he *be* there? The poor boy was perfectly miserable; and when I told him to come

home, I thought you'd help me, Arthur,—I did indeed."

A grave sad smile passed over Lord Caterham's worn face. Here was his proud mother trying to cajole him for the sake of the profligate son who had never felt either affection or respect for her. Had a less object been at stake he might have yielded to the weakness which he rather pitied than despised; yielded all the more readily that it would not be for long. But Annie's peace, Annie's welfare was in danger, and his mother's weakness could meet with no toleration at his hands.

"Listen to me, mother," he said; "and let this be no more mentioned between us. I am much exhausted to-day, and have little strength at any time; but my resolve is unshaken. I will not inform my father of Lionel's return, if you think you can manage to tell him, and to induce him to take it without anger more successfully than I can. But while I live Lionel Brakespere shall never live in the same house with Annie Maurice; and whether I am living or dead, I

will prevent his ever making her his wife. This is her proper home; and I will do my best to secure her remaining in it; but how long do you suppose she would stay, if she heard the plans you have formed?" Lady Beauport attempted to speak, but he stopped her. "One moment more, mother," he said, "and I have done. "Let me advise you to deceive my father no more for Lionel. He is easily managed, I have no doubt, by those whom he loves and admires; but he is impatient of deceit, being very loyal himself. Tell him without delay what you have done; but do not, if even he takes it better than you hope, and that you think such a suggestion would be safe,—do not suggest that Lionel should come here. Let me, for my little time, be kept from any collision with my father. I ask this of you, mother." O, how the feeble voice softened, and the light in the eyes deepened! "And my requests are neither frequent nor hard to fulfil, I think."

He had completely fathomed her purpose; he had seen the projects she had formed, even while he was speaking the first sentences; and had de-

feated them. By a violent effort she controlled her temper,—perhaps she had never made so violent an effort, even for Lionel, before,—and answered,

"I hardly understand you, Arthur; but perhaps you are right. At all events, you agree to say nothing to your father,—to leave it to me?"

"Certainly," said Caterham. He had won the day; but his mother's manner had no sign of defeat about it, no more than it had sign of softening. She rose, and bade him good-morning. He held her hand for a moment, and his eyes followed her wistfully, as she went out of his room.

As she passed through the passage, just outside her son's door she saw a stout keen-looking man sitting on the bench, who rose and bowed as she passed.

When Stephens answered the bell, he found his master lying back, bloodless and almost fainting. After he had administered the usual restoratives, and when life seemed flowing back again, the valet said,

"Inspector Blackett, my lord, outside."

Lord Caterham made a sign with his hand, and the stout man entered.

"The usual story, Blackett, I suppose?"

"Sorry to say so, my lord. No news. Two of my men tried Maidstone again yesterday, and Canterbury, thinking they were on the scent there; but no signs of her."

"Very good, Blackett," said Caterham faintly; "don't give in yet."

Then, as the door closed behind the inspector, the poor sufferer looked up heavenward and muttered, "O Lord, how long—how long?"

END OF BOOK THE SECOND.

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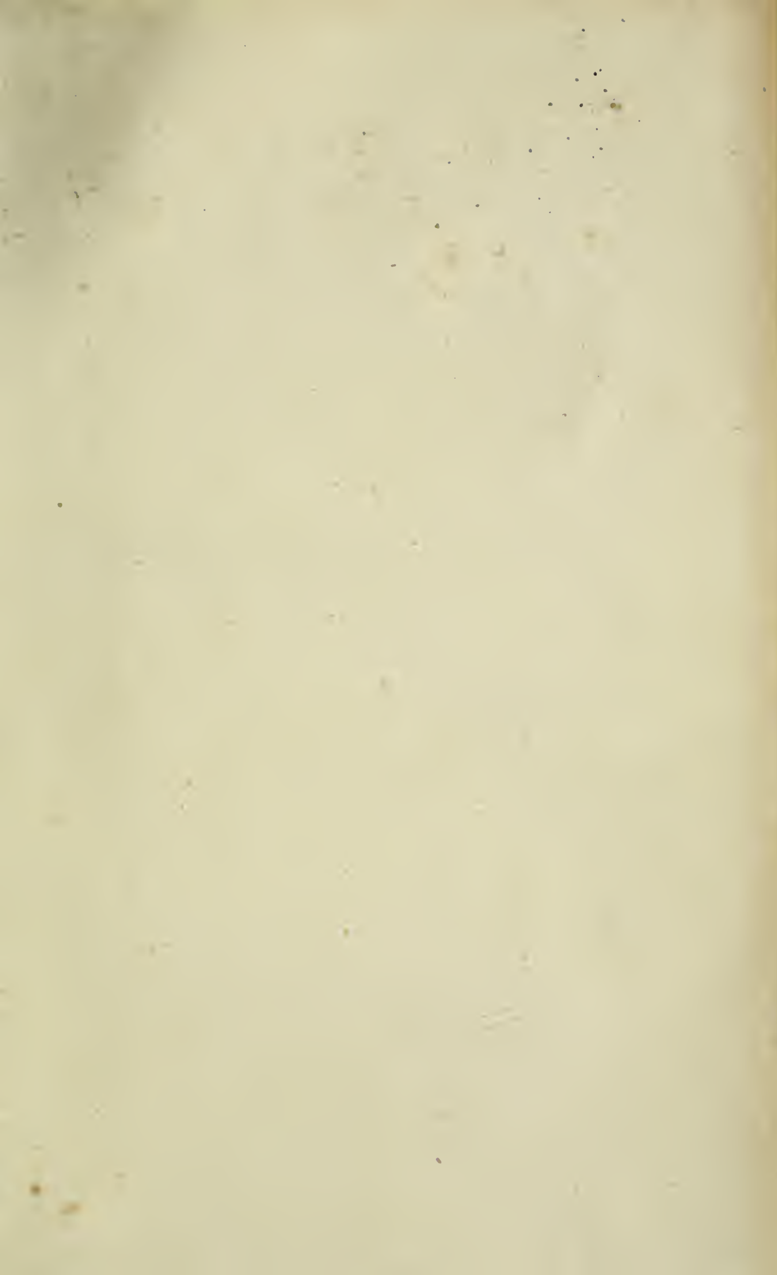

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